EXPLORING THE PERSPECTIVES OF BULLYING AMONGST GRADE 5 GIRLS

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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JUDITH BREDEKAMP

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ABSTRACT

Research into bullying has brought with it an awareness of many aspects of this phenomenon. Firstly, it has shown a distinction between various types of bullying and also how these are further delineated by means of gender. Secondly, by mere omission, it has shown the lack of research on bullying amongst girls. Bullying amongst girls is rife, however the research in this area is limited. The aims of this research are to further explore the complex nature of bullying amongst girls and to gain understanding of its impact; to use the perspectives of the participants to drive intervention and preventative strategies; to dispel the myths which support the practice of bullying; and to raise awareness of an invisible problem, thereby rendering it visible.

This interpretive study explores bullying amongst girls by using the perspectives of Grade 5 girls in a parochial school in the Western Cape. The process of inquiry is embedded in the ecosystemic approach and constructivism, which emphasises the importance of context and the belief that knowledge is not passively received, but actively constructed on the basis of the experiences of an individual. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured recorded interviews with focus groups, which were then transcribed verbatim and categorised into themes.

The themes which emerged include the varied and complex nature of bullying techniques and the effects of bullying. The main finding was that some girls have innate characteristics which help maintain bullying while others have characteristics which protect them from bullying. The environment also plays a large part in either maintaining bullying or protecting girls from bullying. The implication was that intervention and preventative strategies need to be based on these personal and contextual factors in order to effect change.

OPSOMMING

Navorsing oor afknouery *(bullying)* het 'n nuwe bewustheid van vele aspekte van hierdie fenomeen na vore gebring. Eerstens het dit 'n onderskeid tussen verskillende soorte geniepsigheid getoon en ook hoe geniepsigheid verder deur middel van geslag bepaal word. Tweedens het dit ook die gebrek aan navorsing oor geniepsigheid tussen meisies onder die aandag gebring, bloot deurdat dit feitlik nie genoem word nie. Geniepsige gedrag tussen meisies is algemeen, maar navorsing binne hierdie veld is beperk. Die doelstellings van hierdie navorsing is om die komplekse aard van geniepsigheid tussen meisies verder te verken en om 'n begrip van die impak daarvan te verwerf; om die perspektiewe van die deelnemers te gebruik om tussentrede en voorkomingstrategieë te bewerkstellig; om mites wat die praktyk van afkouery ondersteun, te verdryf; en om bewustheid van 'n onsigbare problem te bemiddel en dit daardeur sigbaar te maak.

Hierdie interpretatiewe studie verken geniepsigheid tussen meisies met behulp van die perspektiewe van Graad 5-meisies in in kerkskool in die Weskaap. Die ondersoekproses wat gevolg is, is op die ekosistemiese benadering en konstruktiwisme gegrond, wat die belangrikheid van konteks en die oortuiging beklemtoon dat kennnis nie op passiewe wyse bekom word nie, maar aktief op die grondslag van die ervarings van indiwidue gekonstrueer word. Data is met gebruik van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met fokusgroepe wat op band opgeneem is, ingesamel, waarna dit woordeliks vanaf opnames getranskribeer en volgens temas gekategoriseer is.

Die temas wat na vore gekom het, omvat die wisselende en komplekse aard van afknoutegnieke en die uitwerking van geniepsigheid. Daar is gevind dat sommige meisies ingebore trekke het wat help om geniepsige gedrag te onderhou terwyl ander meisies trekke het wat hulle teen geniepsigheid beskerm. Die omgewing speel ook 'n aansienlike rol in die ondersteuning van geniepsige gedrag of die beskerming van meisies daarteen. Die impliseer dat tussentrede en voorkomende strategieë op hierdie persoonlike en kontekstuele faktore gebaseer moet word om verandering te bewerkstellig.

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CHAPTER 1

WHAT DO YOU DO?

1.1 INTRODUCTION

> **P:** What do you do in a situation if someone says to you … like passes on a note and they pass it to you and you're in their gang, like the popular gang? What do you do if it like says something mean like about one of your friends? Like it used to be your bestest friend and secretly it still is. What must you do in this situation? (T1P16L770-775)

This type of complex social dilemma is what faces most girls in schools throughout the world. Studies conducted in different parts of the world have found that 5% of pupils[1] in some countries (i.e. Norway, Finland, Sweden, Great Britain, the USA, Canada, The Netherlands, Japan, Spain and Australia) to 30% of pupils in other countries (i.e. Italy) have reported being bullied (Baldry & Farrington, 1999 in Carney, 2001). Ideas around different friendship groups, meanness, notes, secrets, rumours, peer pressure and choices are often what girls have to cope with besides the pressures of academic achievement. "What do you do?" is a question often asked and one which is not very easy to answer. This study sets out to demonstrate that there is no single answer. Each situation seems to require a unique set of rules, a unique understanding. This then is the motivation for this study – finding out the understanding girls have of bullying in order to help them answer the question of "What do you do?"

How does one even begin to answer this question? It is much easier to stop behaviour that is visible and recognised by most as detrimental to the wellbeing of pupils. When the behaviour is invisible and covert it makes this task so much more difficult. It is difficult when aggressors are able to hide their identity by using non-confrontational aggression (Xie, Swift & Cairns, 2002), also referred to as social, indirect and relational aggression.

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[1] In this thesis I will use the term 'pupils ' when referring to school-going children in general (Grades 1 – 12). When referring to the pupils in this study, I will use the term 'participant'.

There appears to be an overlap between the concepts of *social aggression*, *relational aggression* and *indirect aggression* but these terms do not appear to be identical, even though Björkqvist (2001) claims them to be. They are similar in the aspect that they make use of peer groups and incorporate similar behaviours. *Social aggression* is defined by Cairns (1994) as actions that cause interpersonal damage and is achieved by non-confrontational methods (cited in Xie et al., 2002). This includes gossiping, social exclusion, isolation and alienation, writing notes to a third party, telling secrets or betraying trust, stealing friendships or romantic partners, facial expressions and body gestures. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) have described *relational aggression* as social exclusion (not talking to or 'hanging around' with someone, deliberately ignoring someone and excluding someone from a group activity by telling such a person directly that she is not welcome), spreading rumours, disrupting and/or withdrawing friendships (cited in French, Jansen & Pidada, 2002). *Indirect aggressive* behaviours suggest that a third party must be engaged or other girls must be mobilised and rallied in support, with attention thus deflected away from the protagonist (Leckie, 1997). In this way the perpetrator and her role in the negative action is hidden or disguised as the girls she has engaged are seen as the perpetrators. According to the study done by Leckie (1997), "the motivation behind relational aggression stems from a need to protect or defend an existing friendship and to deliberately aggress". Thus direct social exclusion would be considered relational or social aggression, but is not considered to be indirect aggression, whereas spreading rumours would be regarded as relational, social and indirect aggression (Monk & Smith, 2000). *Because this study tries to glean girls' understanding of bullying within their context, all the aspects of indirect, relational and social aggression are being considered. This therefore involves gossiping and spreading rumours, social exclusion, alienation and isolation, non-verbal behaviour like facial expressions and bodily gestures, writing notes about someone and passing it to a third party, disruption and/or the withdrawal of friendships and behaviour where harm is indirectly achieved.* I was also open to other examples not noted here.

The purpose of this research is to attempt discovering the perspectives that the role players have on bullying amongst girls, in order to contribute to the current understanding of this phenomenon and also to assist the framing of intervention and

prevention strategies specifically in this context. In order to achieve this purpose, consideration was given to the age group from which to select a sample. After considering the literature and speaking to teachers at the school, I decided to include girls in Grade 5 as this appeared to be the age at which bullying amongst girls seemed to be on the increase in this school. Girls of this age are able to express themselves capably, which was a factor which was taken into consideration, when deciding to predominantly rely on interviewing techniques. The importance of age is discussed further in section 1.7 of this chapter.

This chapter serves as an introduction to the concept of bullying. It also provides historical background to the problem, highlighting the South African perspective as well as the different perspectives from which bullying is viewed internationally. Then the research question of this research project is presented, followed by the research aims. The theoretical framework for this study is discussed, followed by a brief description of the process of enquiry. The manner in which this thesis is structured is subsequently delineated and the chapter ends with a conclusion.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Olweus (1993) stated that research into the area of bullying started in the early 1970s and was largely confined to Scandinavia. Despite the research, Scandinavian authorities only became officially involved when three ten- to fourteen-year-old boys committed suicide in Norway in 1982. It was suspected that their suicide was as a consequence of severe bullying by their peers. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, bullying amongst school pupils also received attention in Japan, England, the Netherlands, Canada, the USA and Australia. This phenomenon has also received some local attention (Greeff, 2004; Mac Donald, 2003; Thayser, 2001). In an attempt to create safer schools in South Africa, Kader Asmal, the former Minister of Education, stated that, to equip the youth with the necessary skills to help South Africa prosper socially and economically, it is essential for teachers to protect them against victimisation, as well as from the risk of becoming offenders (2002). This safer schools project was an attempt at protecting school-going pupils from outside threats. However, the question remained: how are they protected from the threat of peer victimisation inside their school grounds? The focus of research undertaken in South Africa has been on bullying in general (De Wet, 2005; Greeff, 2004; Mac Donald, 2003) or the long-term effects of bullying amongst adult women (Thayser,

2001). South African girls have not been specifically targeted for research, indicating a need for this research.

1.3   THE NEED FOR THIS RESEARCH

One of the main reasons for doing this research is the negative short- and long-term effects that school bullying seem to have on the bully, the victim and the bystander. An extensive list of the negative consequences of school bullying is presented in professional literature (Dake, Price, Telljohan & Funk, 2004; Crick, Bigbee & Howes, 1996; Seals & Young, 2003; Carney, 2000). This list includes aspects of psychiatric concern; social skills difficulties; physical symptoms; suicidal ideation; concerns about home environments and parenting styles; and academic concerns. Recent studies of the victims of relational aggression have shown that pupils who are frequent targets of relational aggression "exhibit significantly higher levels of social-psychological maladjustment" (Seals & Young, 2003:745). This includes depression, which is often related to self-destructive behaviour, diminished social interaction and poorer academic performance. Low self-esteem also appears to be a major concern. "Victims tend to see themselves as stupid, ugly and worthless and (usually) wrongly blame themselves for the attacks (and) have few or no friends to turn to for emotional support" (Carney & Merrell, 2001:368). In a study investigating the prevalence of bullying and victimisation amongst Grade 7 and Grade 8 pupils, Seals and Young (2003) discovered that bullies had the highest level of self-esteem and victims the least.

Whereas boys responded with anger, which Rigby (1995, cited in Owens, Slee & Shute, 2000) argued was a more adaptive response, girls experienced feelings of sadness. This sadness was associated with the long-term effects of depression and poorer self-esteem discovered in a longitudinal study by Olweus (1993) on young adults who had been victims of bullying during their school years. Owens et al. (2000) speak of the victim leaving school to escape the pain, peer suicide, the increase of irrational self talk and the feeling that the abuse will never end. Research has also managed to bring to our awareness the effects of bullying on those who bully, on the victim of bullying and on the bystander as stated by the following authors:

> Pupils who bully are more likely to become violent adults, while victims of bullying often suffer from anxiety, low self esteem and depression well into adulthood … pupils and teens who regularly witness **bullying** at school suffer from a less secure learning environment, the fear that the bully might target them next, and the knowledge that teachers and other adults are either unable or unwilling to control bullies (Banks, 2000, cited in Brewster & Railsback, 2001:5).

Research, therefore, shows that covert aggression can be every bit as harmful as overt aggression. In fact, some studies show that pupils are more likely to be associated with self-destructive strategies like suicide if they are victims of emotional abuse than if they are victims of physical abuse (Education Labour Relations Council, 2002; Olafsen & Viemerö, 2000).

Research has shown that there are short- and long-term effects of bullying. As such some schools have put intervention measures in place as deterrents for acts of bullying. However, there are schools that are "reluctant to set up anti-bullying programs because they are afraid of opening a can of worms" (Soutter & McKenzie 2000:104). Soutter and McKenzie (2000:104) have further stated that "bullying is often such a covert activity it may seem easier to simply ignore it". The creation of this culture of ignoring bullying at an institution could lead to the devaluation of self-esteem of individuals or individuals subjecting themselves to humiliating and/or violent acts. In South Africa this goes directly against the constitutional guarantee of dignity to all human beings in The Bill of Rights (South African Human Rights Commission, 2001) and is, in fact, encouraging discriminatory acts. The Constitutional Court defined discrimination as "treating persons differently in a way which impairs their fundamental dignity as human beings who are inherently equal in dignity" (Chaskalson, cited in South African Human Rights Commission, 2001:11). In terms of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, it is clearly stated that conduct of pupils that violates the rights of other pupils, should be prohibited and disciplined (South African Human Rights Commission, 2001). However, if schools react to bullying as it occurs, the more overt physical bullying may be addressed by nature of its visibility, but indirect bullying may be left to flourish (Soutter & McKenzie, 2000). One therefore needs preventative measures as well as intervention to prevent indirect bullying from flourishing, to make it more visible and thereby to avoid its damaging effects on individuals.

Another reason for this research was to help dispel the myths which appear to support the practice of bullying. Listed below are a few of these myths:

- Sometimes pupils ask to be bullied by doing things in a way that attracts the bully

- Bullying is just child's play; pupils will outgrow bullying and victimisation

- Bullying actually helps weaker pupils by teaching them to stand up for themselves

- It is only victimisation when pupils threaten to harm or harm other pupils physically

- Only boys bully and they only victimise other boys

- There just isn't enough time during the school day to address bullying incidents and teach the academic curriculum

- As a teacher, I don't have much power to change the bully-victim interaction

- I hope my pupils will talk to me, but I don't want them tattling on one another

- Addressing bullying problems is overwhelming – all the change will be on my shoulders

- Bullying is not a problem in my class or in my school

    (Horne, Bartolomucci & Newman-Carlson, 2003:196-198).

Finally, doing research was seen as important for raising awareness of an invisible problem, thereby rendering it visible. It is hoped that the results will be able to inform the intervention and prevention strategies of the context in which I worked.

1.4   THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The research was guided by the following research question:

> *What are the perspectives of Grade 5 girls on non-physical bullying and how can **their** perspectives be utilised for the intervention and prevention of this phenomenon?*

Although it is acknowledged that physical bullying may occur amongst girls, the focus of this thesis is primarily on non-physical bullying, which is considered to be covert and much more difficult to observe than physical bullying. Its covert nature is

one of the reasons why it thrives. The focus of this research is therefore on understanding the nature of this type of bullying at the school where the research was conducted according to the girls in Grade 5.

1.5   AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

Bullying is an unfortunate reality in most educational settings. Although there are different types of bullying, the main focus of research in this area, however, has been on direct bullying as practiced predominantly by boys. *The aim of this research was to further explore the perspectives of Grade 5 girls with regard to the complex nature of non-physical bullying amongst girls, in order to assist this gender, as well as teachers, in recognising this type of bullying for what it is in their context.* A further aim was to acknowledge the consequences of covert bullying and to make recommendations for intervention and preventative strategies. It was therefore important to discover the perceptions of those involved in indirect bullying. Aims also included discovering the reasons for girls bullying, their bullying techniques and the effect their bullying has on their victims in this context. The experience of various teachers has shown that this type of bullying is not regarded in a serious light, as it is merely seen as girls flexing their social muscles. It is relegated to the terms of 'nastiness' and 'meanness' and will not warrant the serious intervention strategies it deserves until the severity of its impact is recognised. Because prevention is considered to be more effective than crisis management, a better understanding of this phenomenon of bullying amongst girls should better equip schools to put relevant policies in place to be used as guidelines for pupils and teachers.

1.6   THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PERSPECTIVE

In order to answer the question: "What do you do?", an understanding of the perception of bullying within the context of the research is also required. Flick, von Kardorff and Steinke (2004) describe perception, not as a passive-receptive process of production, but as an active constructive process of production. In their study on the belief of pupils with regards to the relationship between gender and aggression, Giles and her colleagues (Giles & Heyman, 2005:118) found that the existing patterns of social beliefs of pupils "affect the way they process social information". This seems to be true for all people, including the professionals studying bullying, as one can see in the differing perspectives that they hold on the phenomenon.

Ken Rigby (2004) identified five major theoretical perspectives on why bullying occurs. The five can be listed as follows: bullying as

- a result of an individual difference of personal power,

- a result of developmental processes,

- a sociocultural phenomenon,

- a response to peer pressure and

- a means of restorative justice.

McCudden (2001) spoke of a different perspective to those mentioned above. She speaks of attachment being the prime cause of bullying, which was explained in the following way by Cassidy and Shaver (1999): caregivers[2] interpret significant events in the lives of children and this influences the manner in which children interpret these events. Caregivers also have an influence on the child's constructions of emotion, morality and self. Therefore, the manner in which girls interact is a learnt response based on their observation of their caregiver's behaviour.

Gini (2006) believes that the perspective of social relationship is useful when researching bullying within the school context. He considers social power and group status to be primary motives for peer victimisation. "This is true especially during early adolescence, when youngsters seek to raise their social status in order to enhance their own self-esteem and gain dominance over peers" (Gini, 2006:62).

These many perspectives highlight the need to understand bullying within different contexts, as "increasing our understanding of the view of pupils and adults is key to developing effective interventions" (del Barrio, 1999, cited in Mishna, 2004:235). However, professionals should not only understand the epidemiology of bullying behaviour, and the characteristics of bullies and victims, but also people's perceptions of the problem of bullying. As with the Scandinavian school officials, society largely views bullying as part of growing up (Greeff, 2004) and often the phrase "pupils will be pupils" is voiced as a means of explaining bullying behaviour. The perceptions held by society are important in the drive to facilitate intervention and prevention of behaviour. If society believes that this behaviour is merely part of growing up, what therefore directs intervention and prevention measures must be the

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[2] In this context the term 'caregivers' refers to parents, guardians and/or teachers.

perceptions of those who are affected. Pupils' perceptions of bullying may affect the manner in which they report incidences to significant care-givers who are trying to understand the magnitude of the problem. Teacher perceptions of bullying, on the other hand, could affect the manner in which they deal with the phenomenon. Furthermore, parents' perceptions may interfere with the manner in which they support intervention and preventative strategies. The reasons some pupils bully, others allow themselves to be bullied and bystanders accept it as the status quo, is at the core of this problem (Dake, Price & Telljohan, 2003).

1.7   THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AGE

The developmental age of the girls being interviewed is related to the manner in which they relate to their social world. Owens (1996) reported that "gender differences in indirect aggression do not become apparent until the pupils are older" (Owens et al., 2000:363). Studies by Österman et al. (1994 & 1998) were more specific in their estimation of age and found that indirect aggression in girls predominantly occurs between the ages of eight and fifteen years of age (cited in French, Jansen & Pidada, 2002). Lagerspetz et al. (1988) found that 11- to 12-year-old girls made greater use of indirect means of aggression than boys (cited in Olafsen et al., 2000). Owens et al. (2000:364) also found that "gender differences in the use of indirect aggression became evident during the teenage years". Crick (1999) explained how relational aggression was more prevalent during middle childhood and adolescent periods and that it was more likely to be exhibited by girls (cited in French et al., 2002).

For a global idea of what is happening in a child's life during Grade 5, I have looked at Erikson's psychosocial stages of development. As opposed to Freud's psycho-sexual account of human development, Erikson speaks of a psychosocial theory of development. His theory states that growth happens in a regular, sequential fashion "moving in an orderly and cumulative manner from one developmental stage to the next" in which there are eight stages (Hook, Watts & Cockcroft, 2002:266). However, because Erikson is a "theorist of affect", each stage "crystallizes around an emotional conflict" despite its biological focus and social dimension (Hook et al., 2002:268). Certain developmental challenges are important during certain times of maturation, but are also presented throughout the life of the individual (Hook et al.,

2002). Erikson consequently sees people as problem solvers who are constantly making meaning of their experiences on the basis of contexts (Hook et al., 2002).

One of the problems I grappled with during this research was determining the developmental phase of the participants in this study. I considered two possibilities, that of Middle-School-Age and Early Adolescence. Many of the reference books on the psychosocial stages of development present the stages of Middle-School-Age and Early Adolescence in age terms starting from eight years and 12 years respectively (Hook et al., 2002, Newman, 2003). The reason I considered both phases is that the ages of the participants of this study ranged from 10½ to 12 years. They therefore fell into the transitional[3] period between Middle-School-Age and Early Adolescence.

During Middle-School-Age, significant adults in the pupil's life start to lose their power to influence the child. The peer group starts exerting more influence, exerting norms of acceptance and rejection. As pupils become aware of these norms, they also experience the pressure to conform. When pupils' sensitivity to their social environment is heightened they learn to act in ways which are acceptable to the norms of their group (Newman, 2003). The Middle-School-Age child develops social skills that are vital to later phases of life (Newman, 2003). This is an important factor when considering when best to start intervention against bullying. During Early Adolescence, the peer group tends to become more structured and organised. It becomes more important for the child to not merely have friends, but to belong to a group (Newman, 2003). "During this stage the adolescent's peer group appears to have the most intense influence on his [her] self evaluation" (Newman, 2003:210).

One of the criticisms directed at Erikson's theory is his emphasis on the development of the male, using it as the standard for human development. Because of this bias, there is a "limited means of accounting for female development" (Hook et al., 2002:291). However, Meyer (2005) makes allowances for the different rates of development between genders and states that early adolescence commences at the average age of 10½ to 12 years of age for girls and approximately two years later for boys (cited in Wait, Meyer & Loxton, 2005:149). If one were to take the different rates of development into account, the participants in this study would fall solely in

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[3] Times of transition are normally regarded as turbulent times and are therefore another factor to consider together with the phenomenon of bullying.

the phase of Early Adolescence. However, as the ages of the different phases are merely guidelines, I thought it more important to consider the fact that participants developed at different rates. This is the reason why I considered aspects of both phases as mentioned above.

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prior to the paradigm shift in Educational Psychology, the answer to this question: "What do you do?" would have been simplistic as the paradigm of the time used linear causality as curative measures. The paradigm that was used prior to the shift was the medical model. This perspective is also known as the psychomedical paradigm, the child-deficit model or the individual gaze (Swart, 2004) as it considers the problem to be within the child. It holds the view that an individual's difficulties are the result of a deficit within that individual. The focus was therefore on 'within' the child and the aim was to change the child to fit the world (Swart, 2004). In using the medical model, the focus in bullying would be on the bully or the victim as the cause of the problem and attempts would be made to fix them. However, this child-deficit model is considered inadequate, as it does not take external factors into account. Social, systemic and structural influences are ignored. This decontextualises the child, hence the shift from the medical model to the social context perspective, which is based on constructivism and the ecosystemic theory. The common thread in these two theories is that individuals are shaped by and are active shapers of their social context (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2001). What follows is a brief explanation of each of these theories to show its relevance to the phenomenon of bullying amongst girls.

1.8.1 The ecosystemic approach

Berry and Hardman (1998) stated that the ecosystemic model should be viewed in terms of opportunities and risks. This concept was vital to this research, particularly in terms of intervention and prevention, as it made it possible to gauge when a pupil was at risk with regard to bullying and one could identify opportunities to use as entry points for intervention. Donald et al. (2001:53) also spoke of children's perceptions of their contexts as "central to understanding how they engage with them" as they are active participants in their development. The environment does not merely influence the child.

Bronfenbrenner developed an ecological model of child development to understand how children's development is shaped by their social contexts (Donald et al., 2002). The thrust of his model helps one to understand the development of children in a more "holistic and contextually interactive way" (Donald et al., 2002:57). Bronfenbrenner's model speaks of the interaction of four dimensions, namely: person factors, process factors, contexts and time. In relation to bullying, **person factors** could be considered, amongst other aspects, to be the temperament of the child and parent or the personality of the bully or victim. Examples of **process factors** would be the interaction one might find in families. Different **contexts** would include families, schools, communities, etc. Process, person and context factors change over **time** due to the maturation of the child and change in the environment (Donald et al., 2001). Bronfenbrenner also emphasises proximal interactions, interactions that are close and usually continuous, for shaping lasting aspects of development. The process of proximal interactions is affected by person factors as well as by the contexts in which they occur. Bronfenbrenner places child development within four nested systems, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, all of which interact with the chronosystem (Donald et al., 2001). The *microsystem* is described as the immediate system in which the child exists, and as a result involves the most important proximal interactions (Berry & Hardman, 1998, Donald et al., 2001). These systems involve patterns of daily activities, roles and relationships and include systems such as the family, school and peer groups (Donald et al., 2001). The *mesosystem* refers to the manner in which the microsystems relate to each other. A rich range of mesosystems is the desired state as it reflects positive development in the child. The child is not directly involved in the *exosystem* although changes in it can affect the child's development. These include the parents' workplace, the media and school board, amongst others. Lastly, the overarching system surrounding the other systems is the *macrosystem*. It includes cultural and ideological values of society, politics and policies. It also reflects the shared assumptions of how things should be done. These systems are named in order of increasing distance from the individual. Change in one part of any of the systems affects that system and all the systems as a whole (Berry & Hardman, 1998). These systems will be discussed in Chapter 2 as they relate to the various role players in the scenario of bullying, i.e. the bully, victim, bystander, teacher and family.

One of the critiques of Bronfenbrenner's model of child development is that it appears to be all-encompassing and that almost everything within an individual's developmental environment could potentially influence development. While this detail and complexity may be necessary for a complete understanding of development, the aspects to be discussed have been restricted to those raised by the participants. Using the Bronfenbrenner model as intended makes it difficult and time-consuming to gather and work with an insurmountable collection of data (Hook et al., 2002), it is however, valued for its emphasis of the complex interaction of different systems.

1.8.2 Constructivism

Although Erikson and Bronfenbrenner are not constructivist theorists in the true sense of the word, they do apply many principles of constructivism in their models of development. Several of the concepts of constructivism being discussed will therefore be familiar as they have already been discussed in some form in the previous two sections. These include active agency and social construction of knowledge "where the focus is on the interpretation and negotiation on the meaning of the social world" (Kvale, 1996:41).

Constructivism is a theoretical perspective in opposition to positivism. Whereas positivism believed in finding the truth about human behaviour and applied reductionist thinking, constructivism challenged this by stating that human beings are active agents in their development. The power of their agency is restricted in two ways: the position of the systems of which they are part and their personal characteristics and development. Constructivists believe that knowledge is socially constructed through social interaction. "[I]n postmodern thought there is an emphasis on knowledge as interrelational and structural, interwoven in webs of networks. Knowledge is neither inside a person nor outside in the world, but exists in the relationships between person and world" (Kvale, 1996:44). Constructivists, or postmodern thinkers, also place great importance on contexts, as 'truth' within one specific context may not be considered 'truth' in another. The manner in which they have challenged reductionist thinking is through the belief that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Donald et al., 2002).

Constructivism emphasises the importance of context and the epistemological assumption that knowledge is not passively received, but actively constructed based

on the experiences of an individual. People are constantly making meaning of their lives within their social context. When faced with a new experience or new information they are constantly comparing it to and reflecting on their own experience. A constructivist approach emphasises the active role of people in "constructing and defining their own social realities" (Giles & Heyman, 2005:107). This is another reason why this study focuses on the perspectives of those that are experiencing bullying; as they are making meaning within their contexts it would be unethical and unrealistic for me as an outsider to propose to understand their world without their input.

1.9 THE DANGERS OF STEREOTYPING

One of the downfalls of the medical model was its tendency to label clients according to clinical criteria. It is important to discuss the negative effects of stereotyping before continuing with the process of enquiry. "The danger of stereotyping becomes evident when we begin to see the bully as nothing but a bully and the victim as nothing but a victim" (Rigby, 2002:145). The complexity of human development demonstrates that labelling people as bullies or victims takes away from the richness of their characters/personalities/behaviours. Using the term victim tends to further victimise while using the terms victim or bully may label the pupil permanently (Soutter et al., 2000). However, it is difficult to avoid such terminology as the "terms bully and victim do suggest a relatively enduring personality characteristic" (Rigby, 2002:144), even though prosocial and antisocial behaviours can co-exist. The use of the terms, bully and victim, in this thesis, is for the purpose of simplifying descriptive categories. When used, however, it does not imply an all-encompassing personality trait of an individual, thereby diminishing the complexity of human nature, but merely denotes one aspect of their lived experience.

1.10 PROCESS OF ENQUIRY

In order to add a human dimension to the research databank, this research takes the form of a qualitative interpretive research design. The data will constitute unique perspectives of individuals within their specific contexts with the result that the product of the study will be richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998). "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experience they have in the world" (Merriam, 1998:6).

The participants for this study are a group of Grade 5 girls attending a parochial school (Roman Catholic) in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. Data were collected twice weekly during the second term of the school year. Sessions took the form of focus group interviews. These interviews were transcribed verbatim and the method used for analysis was the Constant Comparative Method, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Collages, which included poetry and drawings done by pupils, were also used as data. Due to the emergent quality of the design, although there was logical order, there was no chronological order to the various steps of the methodology.

1.11 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

What follows is a summary of the manner in which this thesis is structured:

Chapter One serves to inform the reader of the background and context of the study. It briefly discusses the aims, motivation and methodology of the study. It also places the study within a theoretical framework.

Chapter Two provides a broad understanding of the literature review as it relates to this qualitative study.

Chapter Three describes the research design, detailing the setting, the sampling and the manner in which data were collected, recorded and analysed.

Chapter Four presents an insiders' view of bullying with the use of categories as described in the data analysis in Chapter Three.

Chapter Five provides an interpretation of the findings, a description of the limitations of this study and reflections of the researcher.

1.12 CONCLUSION

In conclusion this chapter provides the background on the research on bullying which has brought with it an awareness of many aspects of the phenomenon. Firstly, it has distinguished between various types of bullying and has shown how these are further delineated by means gender. Secondly, by mere omission, it has shown the lack of research on indirect bullying amongst girls. Research has shown that bullying amongst girls is rife, but research in this area is limited. "This is a sobering thought when you consider the amount of energy and resources put into protecting pupils from physical harm" (McKay, 2003:25). Because of its covert nature, those able to effect change are unaware of the severity of the problem and indirect bullying is therefore left to flourish. This raises the third point of discussion, the reactions to bullying and the effects it has on the bully, the victim of bullying and the witness to the bullying behaviour. Because of the effects of bullying, the need for intervention has been highlighted. Intervention, however, may only deter those practicing direct forms of bullying as these are more easily observable. Preventative measures therefore are just as important. In order to intervene or prevent bullying, one has to have a full understanding of the perspectives on bullying held by pupils within the context in which one is working.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

P: Teachers … I think some teachers, some of them need to realise that there's not only physical bullying. Most teachers, when a boy is having a fight, they're there in two minutes. When girls are having fights, it might not be as serious, but you don't see a boy crying after a fight (T7P9L432-436).

P: What she said was also true because boys, well some, most of them fight physically and then girls, they fight emotionally so, some girls come crying home and boys just go home and sit in their rooms and think about it. As soon as they're fighting, they just do fist fights, so after a few minutes they're bloody, black and blue. But girls, their hearts are breaking when they get home, so they carry this on with their life. The boys just fight and get it over and done with. They take all their emotions out on the boy in front of them (T7P9L445-453).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

One would assume that schools are havens of safety for children. Unfortunately, this is often not the case. Bullying in schools is rife and is a serious phenomenon which has been given increasing attention internationally (Carney & Merrell, 2001). Although the emphasis of research has not been on the bullying experienced by girls, much can be learnt from the research on bullying in general.

Understanding the perspectives of the Grade 5 girls in this study is a means of knowing how they see their worlds, as well as understanding the features which need to be exhibited in order for their worlds to be seen (Maynard, 1989, cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). As this thesis is based on interpretive practice, the aim is to document the world of everyday life as it really is for each individual in the study, and not remaining indifferent to their lived reality of experience (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). Interpretive practice emphasises two questions: *what* and *how* that need to be investigated in order to achieve the aims explained above. In this study, the *what* refers to what bullying is in this context and to who is involved. The *how* refers to how do girls bully and how they have dealt with it in the past. The point in emphasising both the *what* and the *how* is to provide an awareness of the alternative ways in which bullying can be construed and the kinds of actions that can be taken

when dealing with bullying (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). The aim is to make visible the "constructive fluidity and malleability of social forms" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005:500) in order to reveal a potential for change. *What* questions can also be delineated as *when* and *where* questions, which can be explained as the times when girls bully and where the bullying takes place respectively. This provides knowledge of alternative constructions that are available so that preferred solutions come into play. Options present themselves and actions can be organised toward preferred possibilities (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005).

Why questions, which traditionally fall in the domain of the quantitative researcher, are handled cautiously by qualitative researchers as this can lead to "inferential leaps and empirical speculations" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005:498). One way of approaching *why* questions in qualitative studies is to "proceed from the *whats* and *hows* of social life" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005:498). In this study, this would mean understanding the various reasons for bullying taking place in this context according to these girls.

The answers to these *how, what, why, where* and *when* questions provide what will inform the recommendations at the end of this thesis. A model of the focus of this chapter can be seen in Figure 2.1 below. As seen in the model, all the answers to the questions that are raised will help frame the intervention.
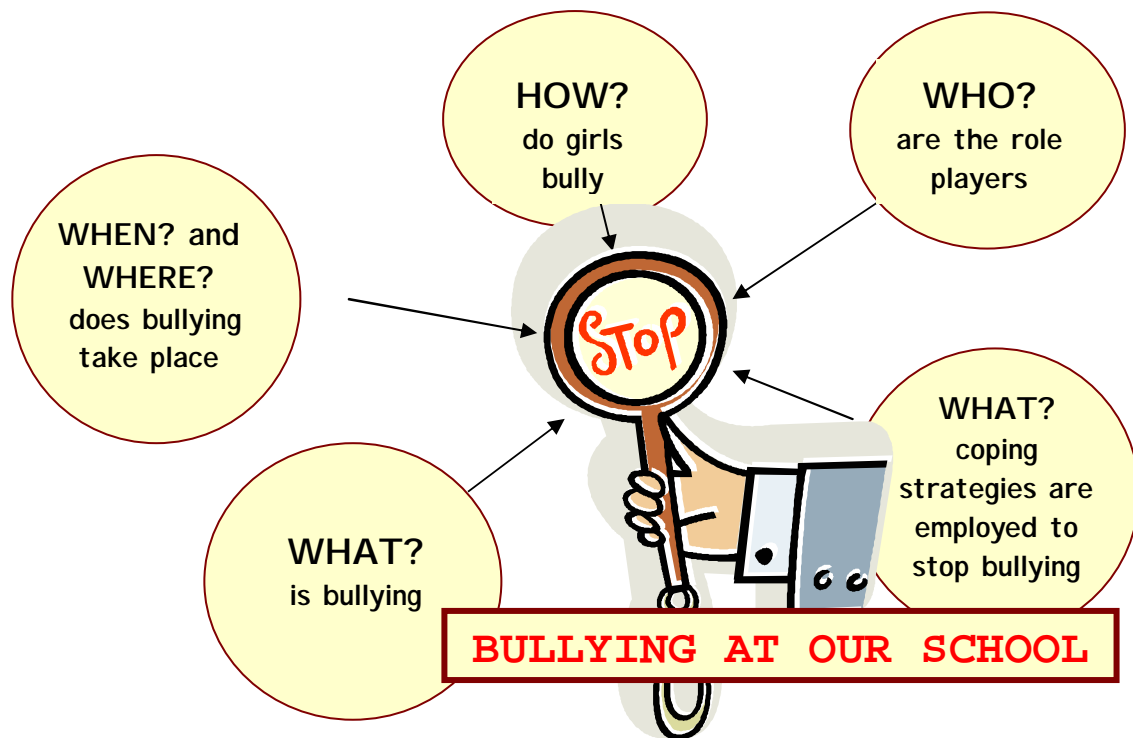
Figure 2.1: Model of perspectives of bullying which inform intervention and prevention

2.2 WHAT IS BULLYING?

Many attempts have been made to define bullying, the bully, the victim, the bystander and other role players in the phenomenon of bullying. Some of the attempts at defining bullying are discussed below in order to gain some clarity about which aspects are focussed on in this research.

Bullying is defined in different ways by various researchers. When it was referred to in Scandinavia, the term 'mobbing' was used. When translated to English, mobbing implies a large group of anonymous people involved in harassment. However, bullying can also involve just one individual harassing another (Olweus, 1993). Rigby (2002) defines bullying as a desire to hurt or a hurtful action which typically is repeated. He speaks of a power imbalance or an unjust use of power. Evident enjoyment of the aggressor as well as a sense of oppression felt by the victim is also part of his definition. Rigby makes the further distinction of malign vs. non-malign bullying. He defines malign bullying as "bullying which is deliberate, intended to hurt and gratifying to the successful bully" (Rigby, 2002:49). Non-malign bullying is when the victim feels that the bullying is deliberate and that the oppressor intends harm and feels gratification for the hurt caused, but the bully is blissfully unaware of the

results of his/her behaviour and does not recognise what he/she is doing (Rigby, 2002:50).

Olweus (1993:9) defines bullying from the perspective of the victim:

> A student is bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.

Olweus (1993) then categorises "negative action" as being verbal, physical, the use of gestures or exclusion from peer groups. He explains that negative action is synonymous with aggressive behaviour as they share the same intent: an attempt to inflict harm or discomfort. One other concept that Olweus (1993) includes in his definition is that of an imbalance in strength, whether physical or psychological.

Besag's definition again differs from those above as it appears to emphasise the moral aspect of this phenomenon (1989, cited in Thompson, Arora & Sharp, 2002:53):

> Bullying is a behaviour which can be defined as the repeated attack – physical, psychological, social or verbal – by those in a position of power, which is formally or situationally defined, on those who are powerless to resist, with the intention of causing distress for their own gain or gratification.

Hazler (1996) defines bullying as a repeated attempt of one person or a group of people to intentionally harm someone either physically or by hurting their feelings through "words, actions or social exclusion" (cited in Carney, 2001:365). The bully is always stronger in some manner: verbally, physically or socially. Hazler also defines bullying acts as a devaluing of another in order to make the bully feel superior.

The definitions that refer to the frequency of an inappropriate act considered to be bullying is questioned by various researchers in the following way: if one pupil is victimised on a number of occasions by various pupils would this be considered bullying and would the attackers be considered bullies (Sharp et al., 2000)? Many pupils support the idea that a once-off bullying act can severely affect the victim of that act for a long period of time even if it does not reoccur. In a study by Sharp et al. (2000:38) on the perceptions of bullying of 12- to 14-year-old pupils, "only 14% mentioned frequency as an element in their definition".

Other concerns that these definitions hold for researchers are differences in semantics, societies and culture. There appears to be no equivalent translation for bullying from the English language into other languages (Smorti, 2003). There also appears to be a difference between societies as far as a definition for bullying is concerned (Smorti, 2003). Children from different cultures may also not be thinking of the same type of situation when they refer to bullying (Smorti, 2003). One of the problems that result from this is that all participants may not be using the same definition when researchers use this term in a questionnaire. It is therefore important to assess what all the role players of bullying mean by the term bullying. "How cultures and individuals define bullying is an important issue because it will influence reported prevalence rates and, at a more specific level, participants' definitions in a specific incident" (Siann et al., 1993 cited in Craig, Henderson & Murphy 2000:6).

As shown above, many attempts have been made to define bullying, but there seems to be no consistency as definitions appear to be bound by context. This does not diminish the importance of bringing the phenomenon of bullying into awareness in spite of the varied nature of perceptions. One of the purposes of this study would then be to discover whether the participants are able to come to a shared understanding of what bullying is to them.

2.3   WHEN AND WHERE DOES BULLYING OCCUR?

According to the literature, bullying most often occurs on the playground, followed by the classroom. Greeff (2004) found that more Grade 5s and Grade 6s than Grade 4s mentioned being bullied in class, regardless of whether the teacher was absent or present. Girls reported being bullied in the classroom more frequently when the teacher was absent (Greeff, 2004). As stated in Chapter 1, the developmental stage of the girls should also be kept in mind. "[W]hen preadolescents are confronted with intergroup conflict that directly involves them as a member of one or two conflicting groups" contextual variables like the presence of an adult appear to be less important than the effect of intergroup dynamics (Gini, 2006:62).

2.4 HOW DO GIRLS BULLY?

In their study on 10- to 12-year-old pupils in Finland, Olafsen and Viemerö (2000) found that girl victims of indirect bullying turned the aggression they felt towards themselves and not towards others. These researchers therefore felt that this gender difference was an important reason for differentiating between different types of bullying.

Research into the techniques of aggressive behaviour identified three types, namely, direct physical, direct verbal and indirect (also called relational or social) aggression (Björkqvist, 2001; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996, also see Section 1.1). The same categories can be applied to bullying. Direct bullying is defined as relatively open physical attacks on the victim. This type of bullying is predominantly practiced by boys. Olweus (1991) and Rigby (1995), amongst others, reported that girls used more indirect forms of bullying. Leckie's (1997) research on bullying behaviours and peer relationships explains that girls may not be inherently less aggressive than boys, but instead express their aggression in a different manner. "Females tend to channel aggression socially (i.e. by exclusion and/or spreading rumours) rather than physically (the males chosen aggressive outlet)" (Carney & Merrell, 2001:370). Crick and Grotpeter (1995) stated that girls are more prone to relational aggression, as this type of aggression is able to damage goals that are particularly important to girls and can therefore be used as an effective means of "gaining control or retaliating against another girl", particularly since girls are more affected by these acts than boys (cited in Crick et al., 1996:1003). However, relational aggression is by no means a female phenomenon. Research has shown that boys in elementary school may exhibit more relational aggression than girls (Giles & Heyman, 2005).

Ross (2003) spoke of girls bullying in terms of striving for close affiliation with others. The following descriptors are also used: the concept of the 'in crowd', "unexplained withdrawal of acceptance, spreading of rumours, and malicious gossip" (p. 69). Carney (2001), however, noted that the focus locally and internationally has been primarily on overt bullying as predominantly experienced by boys.

2.5 WHO ARE THE ROLE PLAYERS?

A range of the various role players is also in line with the ecosystemic approach which was discussed in Chapter 1. The different microsystems within the cycle of

bullying and the different influences between them are highlighted. However, it is important to remember that in an ecosystemic approach, influence is not one directional. This implies that these microsystems are being influenced, but also influence other systems within the bullying cycle. Sullivan and Cleary (2004) call this the "ripple effect". Sullivan uses the metaphor of a stone being thrown into water, with the point of entry being the bullying act and the ripples that result from this representing the effects this act has on various role players. The role players he mentions are the bully, victim and bystander, the parents, others at school and the wider community. Where Sullivan uses levels, the ecosystemic approach uses proximity and the point of disturbance can occur at any place. However, with the ecosystemic approach there is less of a hierarchy.

Figure 2.2 is an attempt to diagrammatically combine the ideas of Sullivan and Bronfenbrenner. The arrows represent the possible reciprocal influences.
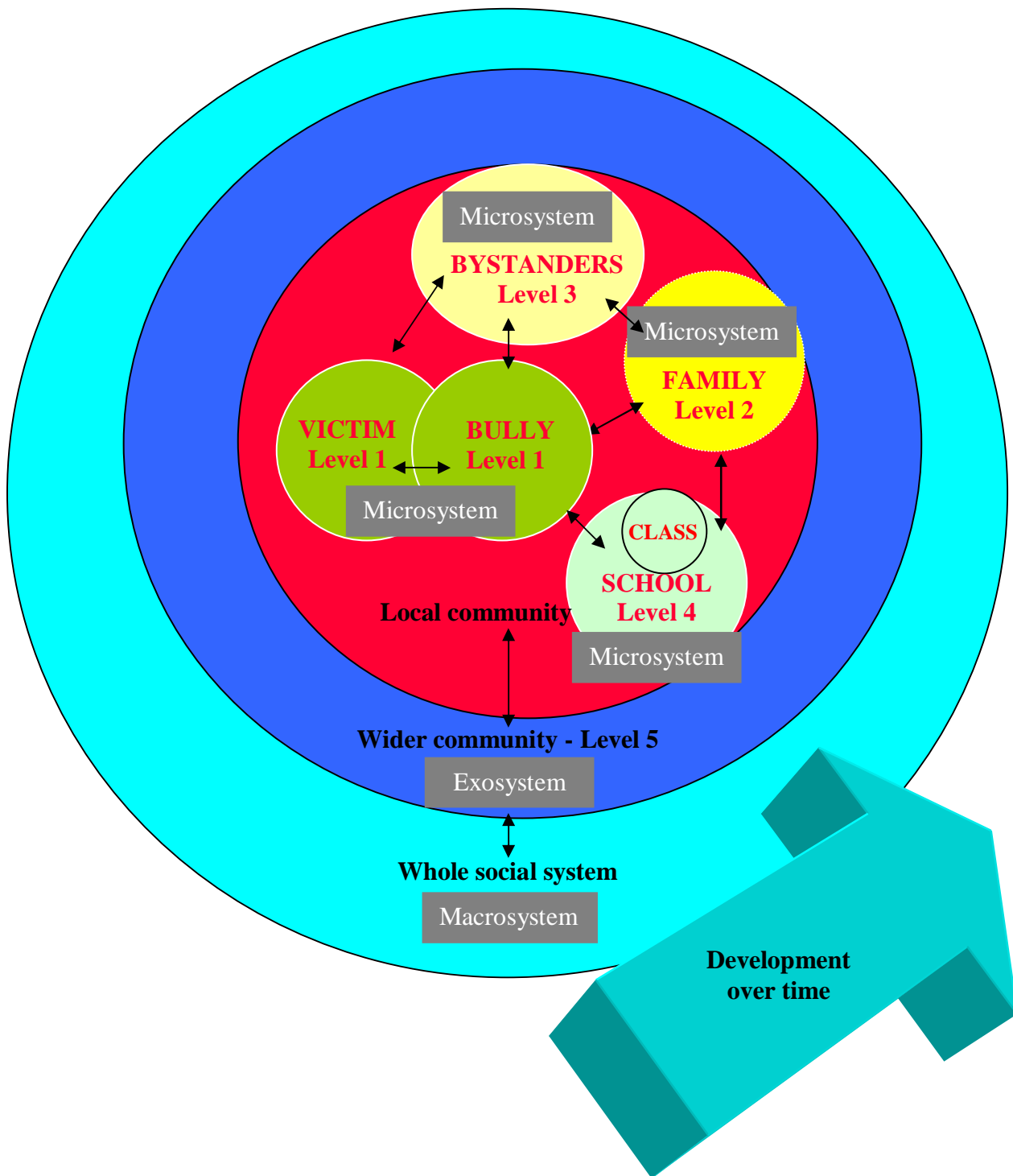
Figure 2.2: The ecosystemic approach and the ripple effect of bullying

2.5.1 The bully

In trying to define the personalities or intra-personal characteristics of bullies, the following aspects have been highlighted by various researchers: cooperativeness, temper, anxiety, insecurity, self-esteem, prognosis, victimisation, social skills, home environment and media. Rigby (1997) and Olweus (1993) define bullies as: "low in cooperativeness" (Rigby, 1997) and "hot tempered" (Olweus, 1993, in Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). Studies have also shown that bullies have average levels of anxiety, insecurity (Carney, 2001) and slightly above average levels of self-esteem (Salmivalli, 1999). If their behaviour goes unchecked, the prognosis for bullies is not positive. Hazler (1994) therefore stated that "bullies whose behaviour is allowed to continue are five times more likely than their classmates to wind up in juvenile court, to be convicted of crimes, and, when they become adults, to have children with aggression problems" (cited in Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002).

Bullies are defined by Pellegrini (1998:165) as children who "systematically victimize a target group of their peers". Carney (2001) extends this definition by adding that this victimisation would occur if perpetrators perceived their actions as having no repercussions or consequences for themselves. This is in accordance with social cognitive theory which states that targets are chosen if bullies know the costs/repercussions will be low (Pellegrini, 1998). This idea of low costs is particularly true with indirect bullying which is often minimised as less important than physical bullying (Soutter, 2000). Children may also be targeted if they are starting at a new school. The sampling hypothesis suggested by Perry (1990) states that bullies may interact with a variety of children with the aim of selecting potential victims (cited in Pellegrini, 1998).

This brings with it the notion of social skills. Traditionally, bullies have been seen as lacking in social skills (Soutter, 2000). However, it has been found that, although bullies lack empathy, they do not have a lack in understanding social situations. In fact, this is a skill they use to manipulate their supporters and victims (Carney & Merrell, 2001).

The influence of the home environment on children who have displayed bullying behaviour has also been studied. It was found that children who bully generally come from homes where discipline is harsh, but inconsistent (Olweus, 1993; Carney &

Merrell, 2001); communication is limited; and relationships are poor (Wilson, Parry, Nettelbeck & Bell, 2003). The manner in which parents resolve problems in the family also is a poor example to their children. The techniques most often used in these families are "power assertive strategies" (Bandura, 1973; Swartz et al., 1997, cited in Pellegrini, 1998:167). Children use the same strategies when interacting with their peers. The media have also been found to influence the behaviour of bullies as their viewing of television was dominated by violence (Wilson et al., 2003).

It is therefore obvious that many factors play a role in influencing bullying behaviour. Would this then also be true for the victim?

2.5.2 The victim

Victims form a much more heterogeneous group than bullies and have been categorised in various ways by different researchers. Salmivalli et al. (1999:1277) also classified victims in terms of how they respond to harassment as "counteraggressive, helpless and nonchalant victims". Olweus (1993) spoke of submissive/passive or provocative/aggressive victims (the former being the most common type, fitting the stereotypical image of the target, and the latter the rarer type of the two). The tendency for blame and a culture of silence has also been used when discussing personal and contextual characteristics of victims.

Submissive victims are more passive in their reactions to an insult or attack and seem to have feelings of insecurity and worthlessness (Olweus, 1993). This strategy of submissiveness may either be related to having low self-esteem or as a means of avoiding further victimisation (Wilson et al., 2003). These victims are also described as physically slight and by middle school are seen as average to poor achievers in school (Olweus, 1993; Pellegrini, 1998).The families of this type of victim have been described as "enmeshed"; overly involved in each other's lives (Wilson et al., 2003).

Provocative/aggressive victims who are often characterised by a combination of both anxious and aggressive patterns of reaction, often have attention problems and may be hyperactive. They also tend to elicit negative reactions from most or all of the pupils in the class. They irritate and regularly cause resentment and irritation (Olweus, 1993). Their social behaviour is described as provocative, as they would "attribute hostile and aggressive intent to a peer (accidentally) bumping into him [her]" (Pellegrini, 1998). The bully-aggressive victim interaction can be seen as

mutually reinforcing as these victims could also imitate the actions of bullies and use it on less dominant peers. Provocative victims differ from bullies in that their aggression is reactive, not instrumental (Pellegrini, 1998). The parenting style of parents of provocative victims has been described as authoritarian, punitive, hostile and abusive (Wilson et al., 2003; Pellegrini, 1998). These parents are perceived as having poor parental management skills, lacking warmth and being self-involved (Wilson et al., 2003; Pellegrini, 1998).

The tendency to blame the victim was prevalent among bullies, as well as among victims (Owens, 2000; Carney, 2000). This blame results in self-defeating inner talk in the victim, which could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy or the dire consequence of suicide. This victimisation, negative self-talk and fear of further victimisation causes already unpopular girls to isolate themselves further or to lose friends, through being afraid of becoming targets themselves (Owens, 2000). In a study by Gamliel, Hoover, Daughtry and Imbra (2003), victims were seen as psychologically ineffectual, lacking the ability to "fight back" (p. 405).

Smith (2000) speaks of the "culture of silence" in which victims are submerged. Many of them do not tell their parents or teachers of their abuse, despite the fact that school policies encourage them to tell (Smith, 2000). A study conducted in Japan, by Morita et al. (1999), showed that only 50% of parents knew that their children were being victimised (cited in Smorti, 2003).

In this section the diverse nature of victims as opposed to bullies has been delineated. The role of the bystander will now be described.

2.5.3 The bystander

Bystanders are often overlooked in the scenario of bullying (Dupper, 2002; Carney, 2000). Considering the role of the bystander was fuelled by a statement of Dupper (2002), who said: "It is harmful to those who witness peer harassment if this harassment is tacitly approved of and not acted upon by school personnel". Other studies, mentioned below, have also highlighted the important role played by bystanders.

Bystander behaviour is an area of considerable importance in accounting for the prevalence of bullying. Studies conducted in Canada, Finland and England show that bystanders are normally present when bullying occurs (Rigby, 2002). What has also

been noted is that bystanders, in most cases, tend not to intervene when witnessing someone being bullied (Rigby, 2002). People typically say they would intervene, but when faced with the situation of witnessing bullying, an overwhelming majority would choose not to do so (Rigby, 2002). This non-involvement, however, can imply sanctioning the behaviour of the bully even if this is not the case (Lee, 2004). This does not imply, however, that they are not able to empathise with the feelings of the victim (Carney, 2000).

Although children may empathise with a victim and think that bullying is wrong, certain group-level variables may encourage them to join in the bullying or, at least, to remain on the sidelines and not intervene (Owens et al. 2000). This relates directly to Bronfenbrenner's notion of the interrelatedness of systems in the ecosystemic approach (see Section 1.8.1). This can be explained briefly as the reciprocal nature of interaction between an individual, who is a dynamic being, and others. As a result, bullying cannot merely be constricted to conflictual dyadic relationships between the bully and the victim, but may be viewed as another aspect of group processes. As a consequence, bullying among peers may be influenced, and even motivated by, social identity concerns, such as the search for higher social status, which enhances individual self-esteem and a positive view of the in-group (Gini, 2006).

What has also been noted is that, the greater the number of bystanders present, the lesser the chance of intervention by a bystander. Not every bully/victim situation elicits the same type of reaction/inaction from bystanders, though. Studies quoted in Rigby (2002) state that the action of the bystander depends on various factors, namely gender, type of bullying and the relationship of the bully and victim as perceived by the bystander.

A number of reasons for non-intervention were listed by Thompson et al. (2002:39-40). They were:

- The victim deserves to be bullied

- It is not my business to intervene

- I thought someone else would do something

- I may make things worse for the victim

- I am afraid of what the bully and his (her) friends might do to me

- I will not be able to intervene successfully anyway

- No one else is doing anything about it either

- I would make a fool of myself if I intervened

- I do not know how to intervene in a non-aggressive, effective way

All these reasons have implications for intervention as it is mostly pupils who witness bullying behaviours and the power of the bystander has to be harnessed in order that change may be effective.

2.5.4 The teacher

Teachers, as one of the contextual influences on bullying behaviour, are daily called upon to make decisions with the potential of impacting their pupils' moral development (Gini, 2006). As the only classroom authority figures, teachers exert a direct influence on the degree to which different behaviours are enforced or inhibited. This concept can also apply to a teacher's actions concerning bullying episodes at school. Moreover, certain personal teacher characteristics, such as being warm, supportive, and personal, can represent a sort of social influence on both pupils' perception of bullying behaviour and on general school climate. These characteristics relate to Bronfenbrenner's person factors of the ecosystemic approach (see Section 1.8.1). For example, a strict teacher provides children with information that is consistently different from the information a more lenient teacher provides, and this factor can shape pupils' behavioural strategies in class (Gini, 2006).

When relaying the results of a study conducted at the University of Bergen, Olweus (1993) suggested that the attitudes of teachers towards bully/victim problems and the manner in which they react in bully/victim situations is "of major significance for the extent of bully/victim problems in the school or the class" (p. 26). Slightly contrary to this, a survey done by Hoover and Olver (1996) showed that teachers could not solely be depended on to identify children with behavioural problems due to the low association between teachers' identification and children's self reports (cited in Liau, Flannery & Quinn-Leering, 2004).

Various reasons have been given for teachers' low observational rates. One of them is that the longer the teaching experience that teachers have, the more likely they

are to ignore bullying behaviour (Meraviglia, Becker, Rosenbluth, Sanchez & Robertson, 2003). Another reason is that teachers may simply be unaware of the problem, as victims are reluctant to "tattle" about their victimisation for fear of further abuse (Craig et al., 2000). Some teachers also believe that victims bring the abuse on themselves due to their "lack in social skills" (Owens, 2000). Boulton (1997) found that many teachers do not include indirect aggression in their definition of bullying (Craig et al., 2000). This would also affect the manner in which they intervened in these circumstances. The results of research done by Craig et al. (2000) highlighted the need for intervention to include the "development of empathy in teachers as well as educating teachers on the diversity of bullying behaviours, recognising bullying and on effective methods of intervention" (pp. 14-15).

Horne et al. (2003) spoke of teachers holding beliefs that are not conducive to reducing bullying behaviour. The following are some of the erroneous beliefs they listed:

- bullying is just a normal part of childhood

- children outgrow bullying

- some children are just born rough

- teachers cannot intervene in bullying situations because they lack adequate training and skills

- it is pointless for teachers to intervene because they cannot change the way bullies are treated at home, where they learn to be aggressive

- frustrations at school cause bullies to behave aggressively

- intervening will only result in continued or increased bullying

- it is best to ignore bullying incidents

- it is OK to intervene only once in a while

Because we act in accordance with the beliefs we hold, it would be more useful to hold beliefs which are more helpful in challenging bullying behaviour.

2.5.5 The family

Family factors, also a contextual influence on bullying behaviour, can exert a huge amount of influence on children as they are beings with their own beliefs, preferences, tendencies and habits and this influence can be for better or worse (Hook et al., 2002; Besag, 1989). As an extract of This Be The Verse, a poem by the poet Philip Larkin (1974), states:

> They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
> They may not mean to, but they do.
> They fill you with the faults they had.
> And add some extra just for you.
>
> (Cited in Hook et al., 2002; Besag, 1989)

All parents are teachers and prepare their children for entry into their social group through providing appropriate social norms and boundaries for children's behaviour (Besag, 1989). Another way in which they influence their children is in their parenting styles, which were discussed in the previous subsections.

2.6 WHAT COPING STRATEGIES ARE EMPLOYED TO STOP BULLYING?

Girls who have been exposed to bullying have also devised coping strategies for themselves, despite feelings of "helplessness and the desire to involve adults" (Gamliel, 2003:417). These protective strategies include "humour, ignoring a taunt, retaliating verbally or physically and avoiding instigators" (Horowitz, Vessey, Carlson, Bradley, Montoya, McCullough & Joyce, 2004:171). When attempting to rate strategies, research showed that the most common means of coping was "avoidance or ignoring the bully and rational and calm confrontation" (Gamliel, 2003:412-413; Smith & Shu, 2000). Avoiding and ignoring bullies were also rated as effective short-term strategies. The less frequently used strategies were found to be "verbal retaliation and cathartic expression" (Gamliel, 2003:412-413).

However, all the girls in these studies were doubtful as to the effectiveness of pupil-generated strategies. They seemed to yearn for adult-driven interventions and interpretation of social events, although this was dependent on the perceived helpfulness of any adult in that context (Gamliel, 2003). Researchers also found that, although pupils are able to name effective strategies, emotional arousal interferes with their ability to put these strategies into practice (Gamliel, 2003).

Teachers have also been involved in strategies where they attempted involving pupils and parents in addressing the concerns of bullying (Noonan, Tunney, Fogal & Sarich, 1999). The importance of the family was also emphasised in a study by Wilson et al. (2003); children who were socialised by their families could use these experiences as tools in their own peer interactions.

Many schools respond to incidents as they arise rather than working systemically to reduce the incidents of bullying. When this occurs, physical bullying may be addressed and indirect bullying ignored due to its 'invisibility' (Soutter et al., 2000). "It is hard for school authorities to identify the subtle exchanges of social aggression" (Hook, Watts & Cockcroft, 2002:319). Even when intervention strategies are implemented, it addresses bullying amongst males and neglects bullying among females (Carney & Merrell, 2001). Bullies are able to take advantage of the fact that teachers are able to deal with physical bullying as it is more visible. Bronfenbrenner suggests that developmental interventions should take place at the level of the macrosystem, as this would impact on all lower levels of development. This idea coincides with Soutter et al. (2000) stating that an attitude change was required. Soutter felt that bullying worked well in schools where pupils lacked an understanding of feelings and who were deficient in empathy and therefore not willing to confront bullying.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has aimed to answer the '*what*' and '*how*' questions of interpretive practice in relation to bullying. Resulting from this, it has highlighted the importance of questioning the given definitions of bullying. Although the given definitions are an important baseline for understanding, it is necessary to ensure that all those who are concerned are speaking from the point of view of a shared definition of bullying while doing research. Where girls bully, and the manner in which they do it, was also highlighted. The various role players in the process and the various influences in the system of bullying were discussed to emphasise that bullying is not a dyadic relationship but involves many role players and various influences. Lastly, coping strategies used by schools, teachers and pupils were briefly discussed to show how easy it is for adults to ignore indirect aggression and how difficult it is for pupils to counteract it without adult support. However, to be able to lend support, adults need to know: what girls understand by the term bullying, where and when bullying takes

place, how girls bully, who the various role players are and how they influence and are influenced by the act of bullying and, finally, what strategies have already been employed by the various role players. In short, their intervention has to be guided by the insight of those who are involved.

The next chapter explains the process of enquiry, which includes a description of the setting, the research paradigm, the selection of the sample and the gathering, recording and analysis of data. The ethical concerns which were considered as the research unfolded are also discussed.

CHAPTER 3

THE PROCESS OF INQUIRY

PARADIGM OF THE RESEARCHER

INTERPRETIVE

METHODOLOGY

EPISTEMOLOGY

ONTOLOGY

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

FOCUS GROUPS

VIGNETTE

COLLAGE

SONG

PHOTOGRAPHS

GIGGLE GALS

POWER PUFF GIRLS

CHICKS NEXT DOOR

PROCESS OF ENQUIRY

CATEGORIZING THEMES

FINDING TOPIC SENTENCES/PHRASES

TRANSCRIPTIONS

TAPED INTERVIEWS
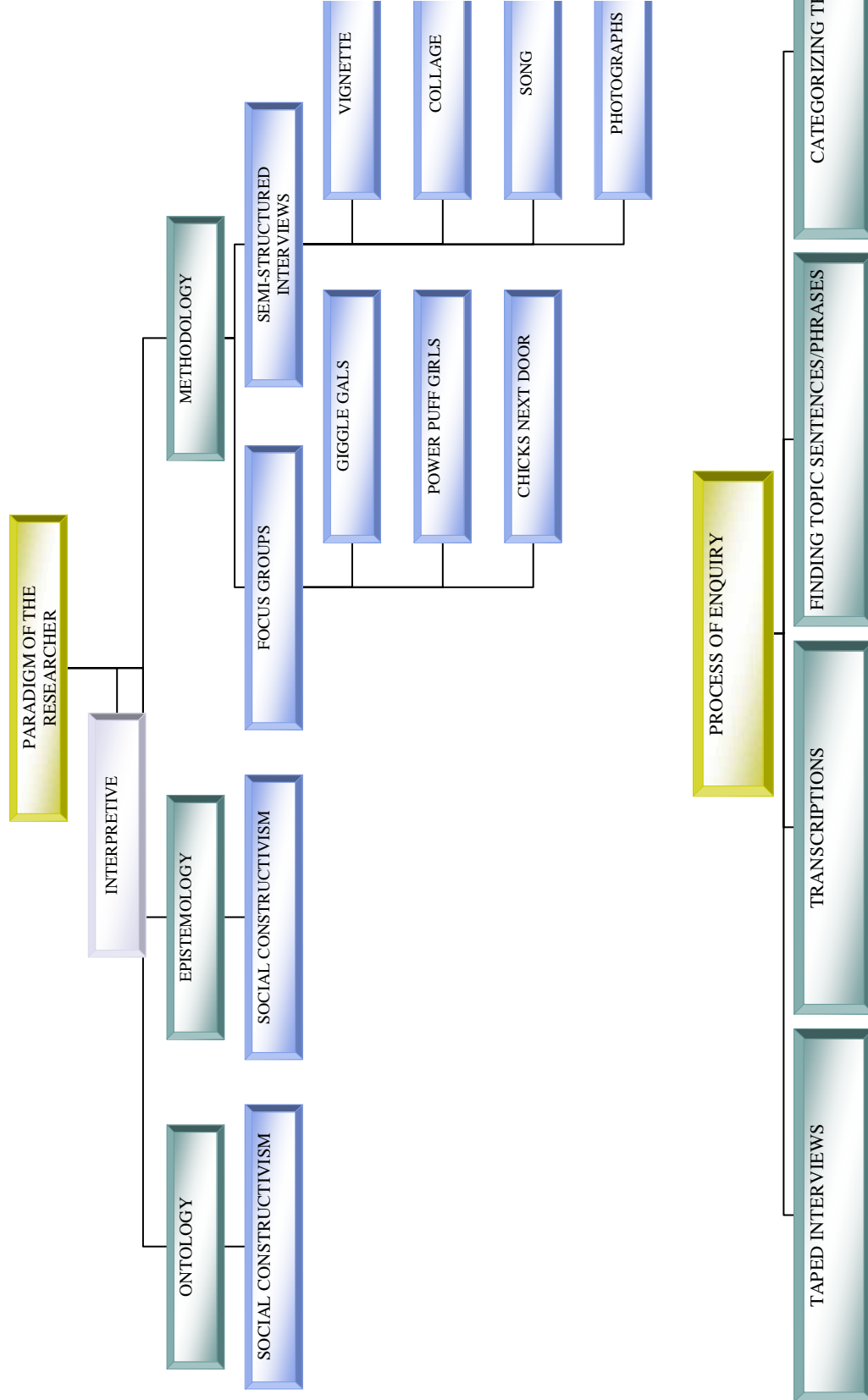
Figure 3.1:
The process of inquiry at a glance

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In his article on the effects of indirect aggression on teenage girls, Owens and his colleagues (2000) reported on the research of direct and indirect aggression in different parts of the world. They reported on the work of Bjorkqvist in Finland, Crick in the United States and Galen and Underwood, as well as his own research, in Australia. All of these were quantitative studies using scales to measure direct and indirect aggression. Much of the research done in the field of bullying has been quantitative in nature, which does not give us an "insight into the actual feelings of children and adolescents involved in peer conflicts" (Owens et al., 2000:364).

In order to add a human dimension to the research databank, the present research will take the form of a qualitative study. In qualitative research "it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behaviour in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening" (Merriam, 1998:203). Qualitative research is inductive. This means that categories emerge from observation and theory emerges from data. The researcher would induce a hypothesis, test it, and then look for other possible explanations (Merriam, 1998). The data will constitute unique perspectives of individuals within their specific contexts, which will result in a product that is richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998:6) further pointed out that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experience they have in the world". As qualitative research often follows an emergent design, planning has to be "open, fluid and changeable" (Durrheim, 1999:31) and often does not follow the sequence laid out in the design. In qualitative research one not only has technical considerations, but practical ones as well. This demanding process is by no means an easier option as "the researcher must continually reflect on the research process; and by making difficult decisions, refine and develop the research design throughout the research process to ensure valid conclusions" (Durrheim, 1999:33). The researcher, therefore, still has to adhere to scholarly criteria.

This chapter explains the paradigm of the researcher, the concepts of generalisability, reliability and validity in relation to this study, the process of inquiry,

which includes the setting, sampling, data collection and analysis, as well as the ethics involved when children are the research participants. The role of the researcher in qualitative research is also discussed as "the reflective capability of the researcher about … her observations … is an essential part of the discovery" (Flick, von Kardorff & Steinke, 2004).

3.2   THE PARADIGM OF THE RESEARCHER

Of the orientations available to research, I followed that of interpretivism which is based on the postmodern premise that there are many realities. This concept of interpretivism lies within the framework of constructivism, which is discussed in Chapter One (see Section 1.8.2). A paradigm can be defined as "interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions: **ontology, epistemology** and **methodology**" (Terreblanche et al., 1999:6). One of the ways of understanding these three assumptions of research is to note how Guba and Lincoln (1994:108) categorise paradigms according to their stance on the following three questions:

- **The ontological question**

What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what can be known about it?

- **The epistemological question**

What is the nature of human knowledge and understanding that can be acquired through different types of inquiry?

- **The methodological question**

How can the inquirer go about finding out what he or she believes can be known?

3.2.1 The nature of reality – ontology

The assumptions about reality in this study are that, firstly, reality is local and specific (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Local realities refer to the subjective beliefs, views and values of an individual. The assumption therefore was that the perceptions of which I would hear would be based on the personal beliefs, views and values of the participants. Secondly, reality is actively constructed, and thirdly, reality is socially constructed. As this research is based on the concept of bullying, a relational construct, it fits that social constructionism, which is fundamentally about relationships, forms part of the analytical framework. The focus is, therefore, on the

essence of shared experience (Merriam, 1998). These essences provide the central, mutually understood meanings of the shared experience of a phenomenon. According to Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, (2004:20), "phenomena and events are understood through mental [processes] of interpretation with are influenced by and interact with social contexts". Patton (1998) explains it in the following way: "different people's experiences are analysed and compared in order to discover the essence of the phenomenon" (cited in Merriam, 1998:15). The researcher has an intuitive grasp of the phenomenon and then needs to get a general sense of the essence of the phenomenon by investigating several incidences. She not only has to discover what behaviours appear in relation to the phenomenon, but also the modes of appearing. The researcher also has to discover the beliefs about the phenomenon before interpreting the meaning (Spiegelberg, 1965 in Merriam, 1998). To put it more succinctly, the interpretive researcher "looks for the frames that shape the meaning" (Henning et al., 2004:20). Individuals taking part in the study have created their own meaning, their own understanding of their experiences. Even though they may have gone through the same experience, their different contexts, values and past experiences have an effect on this understanding. The setting or context of the research is therefore a factor which an interpretive researcher has to be sensitive to. The setting of this research is discussed in greater detail in Section 3.4.

3.2.2 The construction of human knowledge – epistemology

The paradigm on which the research is based is also linked to its understanding of the nature of human knowledge. According to the interpretivist framework, one would have a better chance to objectively capture the world if one used multiple, 'fallible' perspectives (Henning et al., 2004). In order to gain these perspectives, the interpretive researcher accesses "the type of knowledge frameworks that drive society. These knowledge frameworks are also known as its discourses (Henning et al., 2004) which then become the key role players in the interpretive project. These 'knowledge systems' are interviewed by the interpretive researcher (Henning et al., 2004).

3.2.3 The techniques of the inquirer – methodology

The paradigm on which the research is based is also linked to the techniques which were used. The techniques of semi-structured interviews and focus groups are discussed in greater detail in Section 3.6.

Using the three dimensions of ontology, epistemology and methodology, the interpretive researcher, from an empathetic observer status, looks at subjective reality using interactional, interpretive methods (Terreblanche, Durrheim & Pointer, 1999).

3.3 GENERALISABILITY, RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Another question one would ask of research is how generalisable, reliable and valid the findings of qualitative research are? If one is dealing with perceptions of bullying, how does one adhere to the research principles of generalisability, reliability and validity? Kvale (1996) refers to the concepts of generalisability, reliability and validity as having reached the status of scientific holy trinity. In everyday life we use our experiences with one situation or person in order to form expectations of what will happen in similar situations or with people who are similar. However, how does this relate to knowledge gained from research? "A persistent question posed to interview studies is whether the results are generalizable" (Kvale, 1996:232). With this question, the contrast between quantitative and qualitative studies is once again highlighted. Quantitative study is based on positivist theory which differs from a contrasting qualitative humanistic view. Positivists claim that knowledge is objective and one therefore is able to generalise it universally. However, with the post modern approach, the known is closely linked to the knower. Knowledge is therefore seen as a social construction (see Section 3.2.2). This emphasises the idea that every situation is unique and contextually bound. There is therefore a shift from "generalization to contextualization" (Kvale, 1996:232). This idea therefore affects one's view of reliability, which pertains to the consistency of research findings and validity that refer to "issues about truth and knowledge". In this study, the aim of reliability is achieved through the documentation of all the steps of the study which will allow it to be potentially replicable (Henning et al., 2004). Validity within a qualitative study emerges "as conflicting interpretations and possibilities for action are discussed and negotiated among the members of a community" (Kvale,

1996:239). "The quest for absolute, certain knowledge is replaced by a conception of defensible knowledge claims … Validation here comes to rest on the quality of craftsmanship in research" (Kvale, 1996:240). Henning et al. (2004), spoke of validity and I have made an attempt to adhere to these terms. The terms they spoke of were: "craftsmanship with precision, care and accountability, open communication throughout the research process and immersing the process in the conversations of the discourse community". These authors felt that this would allow "the research community to judge the value of an inquiry" (2004:151).

In qualitative research "what is being observed are people's constructions of reality – how they understand the world" (Merriam, 1998:203). As the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, we "are 'closer' to reality than if a data collection instrument had been interjected" between the researcher and the participant (Merriam, 1998:203). When reality is understood in this way internal validity is viewed as a strength. In this study internal validity was achieved with the use of a rich, thick description which will help the reader decide if they are able to use the results in their own context. There is also a trail of evidence which future researchers can follow. The phenomenon was also repeatedly questioned with different prompts to ensure a saturation of data.

3.4   THE SETTING OF THE RESEARCH

As qualitative research has a strong orientation to everyday events and/or the everyday knowledge of those under investigation, the data collection, and analytical and interpretive procedures are bound to the notion of contextuality (Flick et al., 2004). The investigation was conducted within the setting of a parochial school (Roman Catholic) in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The Christian ethos of the school is displayed in various areas of the school including the administrative building (Fig. 3.2).

Figure 3.2:
Religious figures in the administration building[1]

The school was chosen for logistical reasons, for the need expressed by staff for this type of research, for personal reasons of the researcher,[2] as well as the fact that the range of grades extend from classes for three-year-olds to Grade 11. Despite this wide range of ages, the school remains small in relation to many other schools in South Africa, as numbers in classes do not exceed 27 learners. There is therefore a wide base from which to consider different developmental factors and the staff members also experience a close relationship with the learners due to the small classes. The concept of small-scale research is emphasised by Besag (1989:xi). He states the following:

> Empirical, large-scale research with a rigorous statistical design may not be the mode most suitable for the investigation of such a sensitive area [as bullying]. Small scale*, in situ* pieces of research carried out in the individual school or classroom by practicing teachers who know their pupils well, may be a more flexible and fruitful way forward.

Although this school has only been in existence in this area for four years, it has an extensive history as it had previously been established in the greater CBD, before relocating. Many of the staff, as well as the headmaster, have remained the same. The code of conduct is also unchanged. However, the learners, buildings and furniture are all new.

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[1] I have deliberately avoided taking photographs that could identify the school or the pupils. This scene, for example, has changed somewhat since taking the photograph.
[2] I have a daughter who was in Grade six when I started this research. She would often come home complaining about bullying at school.

The school campus is divided into three separate sections for the Early Childcare Development (ECD), the Junior School (Grades 1-6) and the High School (Grades 7-11). In the four years of its existence, a new section has been added each year. Each section operates independently, and the Junior School and High School each has its own Information Technology (IT), Art, Music and Design and Technology Rooms. The Junior School and High School also each have their own tuck shop. Below are photographs of the IT Room (Fig. 3.3) and tuck shop of the Junior School (Fig. 3.4).

**Figure 3.3:
IT Room**

**Figure 3.4:
Tuckshop**

The facilities that are shared are the field, cricket pitches and tennis courts (Fig 3.5) which also double as netball courts.

**Figure 3.5:
Tennis and netball courts**

Despite the fact that the school is still relatively new, a groundsman has been appointed and the grounds are beginning to become an enhancing feature of the school. Below are photographs of the quad in the Junior School (Fig. 3.6) and the flower bed outside the Administration Block (Fig. 3.7).

???

Figure 3.6:
Quad

Figure 3.7:
In front of the administration building

The school grounds also sport climbing apparatus in both the ECD (ages 3 – 6 years) and Junior schools (Grade 1 – 7) (Figs. 3.8 and 3.9).

Figure 3.8:
Climbing equipment

Figure 3.9:
Climbing equipment

Teachers have their own personal computer, telephone as a means of communicating with the office, as well as a CD player in their classrooms. Each classroom also has a storeroom (Fig. 3.10), chalkboard and whiteboard. The work of the learners is proudly displayed on their pinning boards (Fig. 3.11). There are individual tables and chairs for each learner, either arranged in groups or in rows

(Fig. 3.12). This school also believes strongly in positive reinforcement, therefore behaviour charts, star charts or super kid charts are visible in each classroom.

**Figure 3.10:
Entrance to a storeroom**

**Figure 3.11:
Display of pupils' work**

Figure 3.12: A Grade 5 classroom

The school also provides aftercare facilities for the ECD and Junior school learners. These rooms are in their respective sections and also have desks for homework and a television set for relaxation. Even the toilet facilities are aesthetically pleasing, as can be seen in the photograph of the girls' bathrooms in the Junior School (Figs. 3.13 and 3.14).

**Figure 3.13:
Basins in girls' bathroom**

**Figure 3.14:
Toilet stalls in girls' bathroom**

3.5 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

One of the most important instruments in qualitative research is the researcher. Because of the human element, the researcher is able to immediately respond to the research situation and maximise all available opportunities. However, this human instrument is also "limited by being human" (Merriam, 1998:20).

Firstly, the interviewer, particularly those new to the process, can affect the quality of the exchange by the way the participants feel. Anxiety, the personality of the interviewer and her biases may all play a role in the collection of data. Anxiety can prevent the interviewer from noticing important details or can cause the interviewee to answer as briefly as possible. "Being relaxed creates an environment for a thoughtful, rich interview" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005:80). Rubin and Rubin (2005) offer various suggestions to help the interviewer relax before and during an interview. They suggest the following:

- Start with someone you know

- Become familiar with the setting and interviewee

- Go for a walk before the interview

- Avoid back-to-back interviews

Rubin and Rubin (2005) also caution against over-identifying with the interviewee, as this could result in only asking questions which show the interviewee in a favourable light. Not being aware of personal biases could also lead the interviewer to distort what is heard. Another aspect that the interviewer needs to be aware of is the nature of the paradigm in which she/he is working.

In terms of anxiety as mentioned above, what I felt counted in my favour was that I had previously taught in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6) for fourteen years before starting to work on my Master's programme. I was therefore comfortable within the classroom setting and with the interaction with pupils that the research required. I did, however, follow the suggestions for relaxation mentioned above as I wanted to avoid, as far as possible, variables which would negatively influence the generation of data. Although I had previously conducted interviews within a therapeutic setting as part of the internship programme of the Master's Degree, I

realised that the interviews required for this research would be of a different nature. This time, the aim was not therapeutic but research.

3.6 GENERATING DATA

What follows is an explanation of how data was generated in this study. It starts with the selection of participants (the knowledge systems) and then shows how these participants were 'placed' into focus groups. It explains the interviewing that was done, speaks about the various interview sessions and also discusses the manner in which data were recorded.

3.6.1 Selection of participants

The population for the study comprised the two classes of Grade 5 girls. Each class consisted of 26 learners, making a total of 52 Grade 5 learners. The total number of girls came to 24, 12 girls in each class.

The research commenced with the sending out of letters requesting parental consent for the girls in Grade 5 to participate in the research (see Appendix A). Of the 24 letters sent out, 19 produced positive responses. One of the 19 girls withdrew from the study when she left the school. The remaining 18 girls were then asked for their assent to participate in the research with the assurance that they could feel free to withdraw at any time with no penalty (see Appendix B). All 18 girls responded positively and all were selected to be part of smaller focus groups. One of the 18 girls was 12 years old, four were 10 and the rest were 11-year-olds. Of the 18 girls, five lived primarily with their mothers as their parents were divorced. The parents of the remaining thirteen girls were still married. Three of the girls in the study were only children while the rest had siblings. Seven of those with siblings were the oldest in the family, while the remaining eight took the position of the second child in the family. The Grade 5 teachers rated the academic achievement of each participant: five were below average (BA), seven were considered average achievers (A) and six were rated above average (AA). This can be seen in the demographic table of data below (see table 3.1).

TABLE 3.1: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants	Ages	Parents married? Y/N	If N, living with? M/F	How many children in the family	Position in family	Academic Achievement AA/A/BA
1	12	Y		2	1	BA
2	11	N	M	2	2	A
3	10	Y		3	1	A
4	11	Y		2	1	A
5	11	Y		3	1	A
6	11	Y		1	1	A
7	11	N	M	2	1	AA
8	11	N	M	1	1	A
9	11	Y		2	2	AA
10	10	N	M	4	2	BA
11	10	Y		2	2	AA
12	11	Y		2	2	BA
13	11	Y		2	2	AA
14	11	Y		2	1	AA
15	10	Y		1	1	A
16	11	N	M	5	2	AA
17	11	Y		2	2	BA
18	11	Y		2	1	BA

3.6.2 Separating the participants into Focus Groups

As the researcher in this study was interested in the perspectives of individuals on the phenomenon of bullying, using focus groups was regarded as an appropriate interpretive research strategy (Mertens, 2005). Working with groups allows access to an interactive experience (Terreblanche et al., 2006 & Mertens, 2005). The interactive group format of focus groups offers distinct advantages for the collection of rich, in-depth data. Firstly, it encourages rapport, not only with the interviewer and participant, but also between the group members themselves. Secondly, the group format has the capacity to support individuals and promotes greater candour. Thirdly,

the group format encourages people to form opinions about the selected topic through interaction with others (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). One of the strengths of focus group interviews is that they encourage the idea of multiple realities and diverse opinions and perspectives are considered desirable (Vaughn et al., 1996). One also gains an additional insight from the interaction of ideas among the group participants (Mertens, 2005). The goals of focus group interviews are not to generalise findings to larger populations, but to "elicit a greater, more in-depth understanding of perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and experiences from multiple points of view" (Vaughn et al., 1996:16). It is also a means of obtaining substantive information in relatively little time (Vaughn et al., 1996).

Using focus groups also has disadvantages. One of them was mentioned by Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen (2004) when they described a concept called 'group think'. This was "the tendency for individuals to acquiesce by agreeing with the majority of the group" (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004:352). According to Fitzpatrick et al. (2004), it happens most often when the topic under discussion is sensitive. Fitzpatrick et al. (2004) also mentioned the difficulty for some to participate in groups.

A focus group interview was utilised "to get high quality data in a social context where people [could] consider their own views in the context of the views of others" (Patton, 1987:135). The rationale behind this was to look at opinions and attitudes, such as group consensus or disagreement at another level and it can also serve as a source of validation. In addition to "clarifying arguments and uncovering diversity within the group, the group interview also provides insight into meaning created by the group" (Fontana & Frey, 2000:651).

According to Vaughn (1996:49), two things should be considered when deciding on how many focus groups are to be used:

> There should be a sufficient number of groups so that the findings tend to be repetitive and no new information is obtained and there should be an adequate number of focus groups to reflect the range of participants who need to be interviewed to fully understand the topic.

"Focus group researchers do not aim for a representative sample of a population; they try to generate talk that will extend the range of our thinking about an issue" (Macnaughten & Myers in Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman, 2004:68). Vaughn

states that the optimal number per group should be between eight to ten participants and that less than six may not adequately stimulate conversation. One of the concerns is that not all members may show up for the interviews and one would need to take this into account when considering the initial size of the group.

With this in mind, it was decided to have three focus groups for this study. The girls were asked to divide themselves into three groups of six. The concern that came to the fore was the possibility of one or two girls not being chosen as part of a group. The solution that was considered for the eventuality of this was the following: The girls would be asked to form three groups consisting of four members. The remaining six girls would then be asked to join the groups in which they felt they would be most comfortable.

Although this was the plan, practical considerations forced the researcher to deviate from it. The time allocated to the researcher for interviews fell during the school day; four periods of Life Orientation (two periods per class), which essentially was their Physical Education time, and one period of Liturgical singing. Some of the girls did not want to miss out on Physical Education while others had other commitments during Liturgical Singing. Because I respected their choices this resulted in three focus groups consisting of five, six and seven members respectively. Each focus group was asked to choose a name for the group. This helped with organising transcriptions, as well as encouraging the idea of anonymity. The names they used were, The Power Puff Girls, The Giggle Gals and The Chicks Next Door, named thus as they were the combined group (two girls from one class and five from the other) and the classes were next door to each other.

Mertens (2005:386) also spoke of the importance of "systematic variation across groups". This meant having groups that vary within different dimensions. One of the ways of achieving this is "comparing responses of individuals who are brought back for more than one group session". Part of the design therefore included four contact sessions for each focus group.

3.6.3 Conducting the focus group interviews

As this research had the nature of an interpretive, descriptive qualitative study, its strategy was inductive. There were no hypotheses to prove or theories to validate, as understanding the phenomenon of bullying and gleaning perspectives from the

participants through their use of language was the aim. The use of interviews was based on the social constructionist belief[3] that "the certainty of our knowledge is a matter of conversation between persons, rather than a matter of interaction with a nonhuman reality. If we regard knowing not as a having an essence but as a right to believe, we may see conversation as the ultimate context within which knowledge is understood" (Kvale, 1996:37). Kvale (1996:42) further stated that 'the qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge" due to the essence of its interrelatedness. Fitzpatrick et al. (2004:348) said the following about interviews: "… interviews allow clarification and probing and permit exploration and discovery." Based on social constructionism, conversation "involves a basic mode of constituting knowledge; and the human world is a conversational reality" (Kvale, 1996:37). In other words the interview "is a social production of meanings through linguistic interaction: the interviewer is a co-producer and a co-author of the resulting interview text. In this interrelational conception the interviewer does not uncover some pre-existing meanings, but supports the interviewees in developing their meanings throughout the course of the interview" (Kvale, 1996:226). Therefore the subjective reality of the participant is allowed to emerge and there is a co-construction of meaning within the group.

"Qualitative researchers tend to favour semistructured or unstructured … interview formats" (Mertens, 2005:387) as the goal is to establish a human-to-human relationship with participants in order to understand their perspectives. The aim is to establish a conversational style, which helps to create rapport with the participants. Rapport is essential to gain richly descriptive, in-depth data. For this study, I decided to use the semistructured format which requires the use of an interview guide as it seemed the best way to establish the human-to-human relationship and help create rapport. An interview guide (Appendix C) serves as a basic checklist which ensures that the researcher covers all the necessary themes during the interview (Patton, 1987). Although the questions are written sequentially, it is at the interviewer's discretion to build conversations around various topic areas, to re-word questions and to adapt the sequence of the questions. However, the guide keeps the interaction focused, but "allows individual perspectives and experiences to emerge" (Patton, 1987:111).

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[3] This notion links to the epistemology of the study, which was discussed in Section 3.2.2

The interviews were structured to include three types of questions: "main questions, follow-up questions and probes" (Rubin, 2005:129). The main questions that form part of the interview guide are utilised to ensure that all the relevant areas of interest (from the literature and from personal experience) are covered during the interview. Follow-up questions are then used to get explanations for concepts that emerge from the answers of the participants. Probes help to keep the conversation on the topic and signal the appropriate depth of discussion (Rubin, 2005). As one of the aims of the research was to get a better understanding of bullying from the perspective of the participants, and because words count as data, asking for detail would be important. Details provide the precise evidence on which to base conclusions. Details are gained through asking questions which elicit detail. For example, when told that girls were nasty to them, the researcher would ask: "In which ways were they nasty?" Or when being told about an event, the participants were asked about the sequence of that event.

As suggested by Flutter and Rudduck (2004), the interview questions were tried out on a pilot sample of participants of a similar age who were not involved in the actual research. As a result of this exercise, some of the wording of the questions was simplified, for example: 'intentional' was changed to 'on purpose'. This pilot exercise also emphasised the value of smaller groups as a means for better control over a conversation, as well as a better chance of recognising voices when they are taped. The length of time that these learners could concentrate during interviews was also highlighted. As a result, the proposed time for the focus group interviews was changed from one big block to smaller, more manageable periods for discussion, allowing 30 minutes per focus group interview. The pilot study also highlighted the potential of a learner dominating an interview. This type of participant is either known as a 'genuine expert' or a 'pseudo expert'. Genuine experts know quite a bit about the topic and silence other participants with their knowledge, while pseudo experts act as if they know a lot about the topic and thereby annoy others (Vaughn et al., 1996). Provision was made for this by always being aware of the possibility of one participant dominating the interview and using follow-up questions like: "Does anyone else have a different view?" Another strategy that was employed was to change the seating of the participants so that silent participants would be moved to the "strategic" positions previously occupied by the dominant participant. Despite

asking the girls in the pilot study not to use the names of those involved in the incidents that they reported, it was noted that they needed reminders. The need for the use of child-friendly prompts like stories, pictures, poems, to help the learners focus their ideas, was also highlighted.

3.6.4 The Different prompts for the Focus Group Interviews

There were four different interview sessions per focus group, each using a different prompt and an interview guide based on the prompt. The reason for this was the need to elicit a variety of responses and to attempt thorough covering of the subject matter. The prompts used included a vignette, collage, song and photographs.

3.6.4.1   The vignette

In order to facilitate discussion in the focus groups, the first interview for each group was initiated with a vignette (Fig. 3.14) that was read to the participants. The vignette was adapted from a vignette used by Owens, Slee and Shute (2001) when they researched the effects of indirect aggression on girls. The participants of this study were then asked questions from the question guide based on the reading. After the discussion, the main ideas that surfaced were used to describe what they thought constituted bullying. One of the advantages of using the vignette was that it helped focus discussion. It also helped the girls with an empathic stance. This was important for this study as these participants were not divided into groups of bullies, victims or bystanders. They therefore needed to put themselves in the place of these role players in order to share their understanding of the phenomenon of bullying. The disadvantage of using this prompt was that it tended to focus discussion too much, not allowing for other ideas which were not presented in the vignette. Participants who struggled to embroider on a topic were therefore reliant on others in the group who could do this with ease or was countered by myself with the question; "which ideas are not presented in this story?"

The girls in the focus groups were also presented with an incident report (Fig. 3.15) after the focus group interviews, so that they could jot down recollections of events, or new experiences they might come across concerning the phenomenon that was studied. These reports were posted to the researcher in a special gift bag left in their classes. As a "glossary of words to be used in the recording helps to standardize the language" (Pellegrini, 1998:172), the incident report comprised a typed form to

standardise the format of reporting. It was stressed that there was no hidden agenda for these documents and that the sole purpose was to assist the research. The participants were therefore encouraged to use pseudonyms for those involved in the incident they were recording. These documents were used for collaborative purposes and not to investigate the frequency of bullying at this school. The participants did not make use of the incident reports. They would mention them at follow-up interview sessions, but seemed to place little importance on using them. This could be because they felt the incident report was more like homework, an extra chore they did not need.

Sally is a 10-year-old Grade 5 girl attending a school in this area. She is an average pupil and is involved in sporting activities after school. In the past she was well accepted and had a close group of friends. She got on well with most of the children in her class. After a day off with illness, she returns to school to find out that things have changed.

She walks over to her usual group of friends, but when she tries to talk to any of them their responses are abrupt and unfriendly. She tries to catch the eye of her friend Cathy, but Cathy avoids her gaze.

During the Design and Technology class and the Music lesson they are told to form groups. Sally tries to find Cathy to join up with her as she normally does, only to find that Cathy is sitting with someone else. During break, she joins her usual group of friends late, just in time to overhear one of them saying something nasty about her. No one seems to want to sit with her during class or during break and she starts discovering people laughing at her even when she makes the smallest mistake. When she complains to someone, they brush her off and tell her to make other friends (Adapted from a vignette used by Owens et. al., 2000).

Figure 3.15: The vignette

Figure 3.16: The incident report

3.6.4.2 The collage

The second session started with a creative activity with participants being asked to make a collage of what they considered a bully to be. Each participant was asked to choose a preferred activity from the given list: writing poetry, drawing, finding and cutting pictures out of magazines and artistically writing words which describe bullying. They then carried out the task they were given. Some participants worked in pairs while others preferred to work on their own. When they had completed their tasks, it was compiled as a collage.[4] They then explained their pictures, poems, words or drawings to the rest of the group and answered a few questions from an interview guide.

This prompt worked well in the focus groups, as it gave those who were not strong verbally, but were more creatively orientated, a chance to express themselves artistically. It also allowed the participants an opportunity to explain the phenomenon that was being studied metaphorically and provided deeper insight into their experiences.

3.6.4.3 The song

The prompt for the third session was a song called Ugly (Appendix D), sung by a group called the Sugababes (Fig. 3.17). The words were handed to each participant and they sang along while listening to the CD recording of the song. The ideas in the song were then used to elicit their own personal experiences.

The song was very successful at placing the participants at ease which allowed them to enjoy an animated discussion. This prompt was also successful in that the song was popular at the time and the participants easily related to the use of music. The disadvantages of a prompt like this is that it takes the participants away from their personal experiences and draws them more to an understanding of the literary context of the song. Analysis of the words, at times, was beyond their scholastic level.

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[4] Two of the collages have been used in Chapter 4 as part of the findings. See Sections 4.3.1.1 and 4.4.

Ugly

When I was seven they said I was strange
I noticed that my eyes and hair weren't the same
I asked my parents if I was okay
They said you're more beautiful and that's the way
They show that they wish that they had your smile
So my confidence was up for a while
I got real comfortable with my own style
I knew that they were only jealous cause

Chorus
People are all the same
And we only get judged by what we do
Personality reflects name
And if I'm ugly then so are you, so are you

There was a time when I felt like I cared
That I was shorter than everyone there
People made me feel like life wasn't fair
And I did things that made me ashamed
Cause I didn't know my body would change
I grew taller than them in more ways
But there will always be the one who will say
Something bad to make them feel great

Chorus

Everybody talks bad about somebody and
Never realises how it affects somebody and
You bet it won't be forgotten
Envy is the only thing it could be

Chorus 2X

Figure 3.17: The words of the song

3.6.4.4 The photographs

In the final interview session, the focus groups were presented with 15 different photographs which had been taken on the school premises (Appendix E). These photographs were based on previous discussions of areas they had mentioned in connection with where bullying takes place at the school. They were then asked to choose a photograph they could relate to bullying, and to write down their thoughts about their choice on paper. These thoughts were read out to the group and the session ended with a final question: Have you learnt anything from the sessions we have had together or was it just fun to come and chat?

This prompt seemed to provide the participants with a means of grounding their emotions. Although not all the pieces written by them could be used by the

researcher, they seemed to offer the participants an invaluable means for a final expression of their ordeals at school.

As the interviews had to stop during the examinations, there was less time to complete the process. The final session with the 'Chicks Next Door' consequently used two prompts and their session was slightly longer than the usual thirty minutes.

An audit trail (Table 3.2) is provided to give an overall picture of the process.

TABLE 3.2:   AUDIT TRAIL

DATE	METHOD	VENUE	ROLE PLAYERS	RESULT
November 2005	Gaining access to the school telephonically		Headmaster	Referral to Head of intermediate phase and counsellor in Senior phase
February 2006	Gaining access telephonically		High school staff member	Suggestion of Grade 7 learners
March 2006	Gaining access (first meeting)	School	Intermediate Phase principal (who is also the Grade 5 educator)	Suggestion of Grade 5 learners as well as dates for interviews
March 2006	Gaining access	School	Grade 5 educators	Letters handed out
March 2006	Gaining access	School	Grade 5 learners	Letters returned and assent letters handed out
24 April 2006	Focus Group interviews (Vignette)	School	Power Puff Girls Giggle Gals	Transcriptions
5 May 2006	Focus Group interviews (Vignette)	School	Chicks Next Door	Transcriptions
15 May 2006	Focus Group interviews (Collage)	School	Power Puff Girls Giggle Gals	Transcriptions
22 May 2006	Focus Group interviews (Song)	School	Power Puff Girls Giggle Gals	Transcriptions
29 May 2006	Focus Group interviews (Photographs)	School	Power Puff Girls Giggle Gals	Transcriptions
2 June 2006	Focus Group interviews (Collage)	School	Chicks Next Door	Transcriptions
9 June 2006	Focus Group interviews (Song & Photographs)	School	Chicks Next Door	Transcriptions

3.6.5 Recording the data

The interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the participants. These recordings were then transcribed verbatim and the texts were analysed according to

the specific methods outlined below. Written descriptions of subjects within the groups was also important as it helped identify the participants when transcribing. Notes were taken after interviews to give details of interesting aspects of the interview which could not be caught on tape. The purpose of note taking is to record observational data as well as the reflections of the interviewer after each session. This information also helped with the interpretation of the transcripts (Vaughn et al., 1996). When noting body language, the developmental level of the participant should be considered. When emotional involvement is high, pre-adolescents can be very expressive in their body language – so much so that their non-verbal language may at times appear to be over-exaggerated in the eyes of adults (Keats, 2000). However, noting this non-verbal language assists in the interpretation of the findings and allows for vividness of data, which helps to personalise the report, so that the participants can be seen as real people rather than abstractions (Rubin, 2005). Vividness of data also allows for a richness of themes and ideas when the complex lives of the participants are unravelled during data analysis (Rubin, 2005).

To further assist data analysis, key ideas were initially summarised on a flip chart during the group interviews. The aim of jotting down the key ideas was to allow for a summary when closing the interview and for providing central ideas when analysing data. Using this method during the first interview, however, proved to result in discontinuity and the flow of conversation was interrupted. The method was therefore discontinued.

Four aspects that helped with the interpretation of results had to be considered when listening to the recordings or reading through transcripts. These aspects were suggested by Krueger (1988, cited in Vaughn et al., 1996). The first aspect concerned finding the big ideas in a variety of data sources: the non-verbal responses, the emotional intensity of responses and comments and occasions when participants agreed with each other or vehemently disagreed. The second aspect concerned consideration of their choice of words and the meanings intended by the participants. These could later be probed for further information. The third aspect that has to be considered concerned the extent to which the participants were influenced by each other in the group. Finally, it was necessary to consider the consistency of responses and check whether participants change their opinions as the discussion progresses.

3.7   DATA MANAGEMENT

Due to the nature of qualitative research, "data analysis is simultaneous with data collection" (Merriam, 2002:14). This implies that the analysis of data begins after the first interview. This preliminary analysis helps with the formulation of more focussed questions around central themes, which arise from the interviews.

3.7.1   Analysing and interpreting data

When analysing the data in qualitative research, the aim is to better understand the phenomenon that is being studied (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Patton (1987:144) speaks of analysing data by organising it into "patterns, categories and basic descriptive units". Interpreting data "involves attaching meaning and significance to the analysis" (Patton, 1987:144) of data being studied while remaining as close to the participants' contributions as possible. Due to the nature of qualitative research, analysis and interpretation of data often happens simultaneously. The method used for the analysis of the data in this study is called the "constant comparative method" introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and refined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) (in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:126). Part of analysis involves the coding of data.

The first step in coding involves labelling the type of data being analysed. However, the transcriptions are first read repeatedly to get a feel for the data. A code is then created for the type of data, the source of the data, the page number and the line on which the source can be found. As all the transcripts in this research were numbered as interviews occurred, the source of the data always involved a number. An example of a code would therefore be T3P23L246. This represents: the third transcript found on page 23, line 246. Documents are also numbered and the initial D precedes each number. Documents included collages made by the participants, the Code of Conduct and the participants' analysis of photographs. The next step in this process is unitising the data.

Unitising involves identifying topic sentences in the data which will later be used as the basis for defining larger categories of meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). These units of meaning were highlighted and labelled using a word or phrase to indicate the essence of meaning for that particular unit. These units are then grouped with other units of similar meaning, creating categories. "Categories are superordinate headings that provide an organizational theme for the units of data"

(Vaughn et al., 1996:107). As the sorting progresses, additional categories may present themselves and there may be units which do not belong to any of the categories. These units are placed in a miscellaneous pile. Categories which overlap are considered to see whether they have similar properties. They are then collapsed into a larger category or subdivided into smaller categories. The miscellaneous pile is sorted, once again, into existing categories and new categories, or simply discarded (Vaughn et al., 1996). While sorting the units of information, the criteria for each category is still vague. This changes after six to eight units have been sorted. A rule for inclusion is now written before sorting additional units of meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). An example of this description of data analysis is shown below, in Figure 3.18.

Okay so that could have been another rumour about why she was absent. — Rumours

Maybe they really believed that she was sick and that sickness can spread and they just don't really want to be around her because (fades to nothing) — Physical

Okay so it could be contagious or a really bad sickness

She could carry a disease and they don't want to get it.

Maybe something happened in the group and they didn't want to tell her. — Keeping secrets

What could have happened in the group? Something happened and they don't want her to know. So they're keeping secrets from her. — Exclusion from groups

Maybe it's someone's birthday and Sally doesn't know how to do the one obstacle and they don't want her to ruin the birthday and they don't tell her that …

Oh. So someone is having a birthday and they're excluding her, not letting her in on it. — Jealousy

They might be jealous of her — Monetary status

Why do you think they would be jealous? — Social status

Well maybe she's got better clothes or saying she's got a boyfriend and her friends are jealous because she's got a popular boyfriend. — The value of boyfriends

Figure 3.18: A selection of transcribed data

The units of meaning on the right hand side of the transcription were grouped into different categories and each category was given a code: what is bullying? why do girls bully? who are the role players? what do girls do to protect themselves from

bullying? The units of meaning were then written under each category heading and a decision was taken about a rule of inclusion. Before the final categories and rules for inclusion were decided upon a few attempts for categorising the data were made. However, the previous attempts did not do justice to the data collected.

In order to create a rule of inclusion, the characteristics of the units of meaning already clustered are checked. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have suggested writing this rule as a propositional statement as it "conveys the meaning that is contained" in the units that are grouped under that category (In Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:139). This is followed by renaming of the categories, so that they are more descriptive in nature. In this study, the new category names were: bullying techniques, maintaining factor, protective factors and results of bullying. Some of these categories were subdivided into personal and contextual factors (see Figure 3.19). A category code using the initials of this new category name is created for each unit of meaning under that category. As the rest of the units are grouped into these new categories using the rules for inclusion, categories may be adjusted or changed. Categories and rules for inclusion can be seen below, in Figure 3.19.

When the findings were integrated (Chapter 5), they were categorised into person, process and context factors which facilitated a link to Bronfenbrenner's theory as explained in Chapter 1.

RULES FOR INCLUSION
Different ways in which girls bully each other.

BULLYING TECHNIQUES

- **Verbal**
  - Rumours
  - Gossiping
  - Ridicule
  - Saying nasty thing
- **Non verbal**
  - Body language
  - Gestures
- **Social**
  - Social Exclusion
  - Peer pressure
  - Revealing secrets
  - Hurting someone unintentionally

RULES FOR INCLUSION
Characteristics that girls have or lack as well as the limitations of their context which sustain bullying.

PERSONAL MAINTAINING FACTORS

- **Intra-personal factors**
  - Maladaptive coping strategies
  - Low self-efficacy
  - Different personality types
  - Lack of social skills
- **Inter-personal factors**
  - Physical Attributes
  - Jealousy
  - Retaliation
  - Fitting in
  - Loneliness

CONTEXTUAL MAINTAINING FACTORS

- **Social factors**
  - Books and movies
  - Boyfriends
  - Group dynamics and social structure
  - Boys vs girls
- **Family factors**
  - Communication
  - Parenting styles
  - Role models
- **School factors**
  - Teachers listening and responding
  - Knowledge of bullying

RULES FOR INCLUSION
Characteristics that girls have as well as well as characteristics of their contexts which do not support

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- **Intra-personal factors**
  - Coping strategies
    - Crying
    - Diaries
    - Hitting
    - Talking
  - Self Confidence
  - Courage
  - Empathy
  - Self esteem
- **Inter-personal factors**
  - Forgiveness

CONTEXTUAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- **Social support factors**
  - Telling someone
  - True friendship
  - United front against bullying
  - Educating
  - Observant
  - Lessons we learn
- **Family support factors**
  - Relationships and communication patterns
- **School support factors**
  - Vigilant Teachers
  - Size of the school

BULLYING

RESULTS OF BULLYING

- Being invisible
- Hurt
- Embarrassment
- Fear
- Wishing you were not alive
- Powerlessness
- Frustration
- Irritation
- Physically ill
- Bad memories

RULES FOR INCLUSION
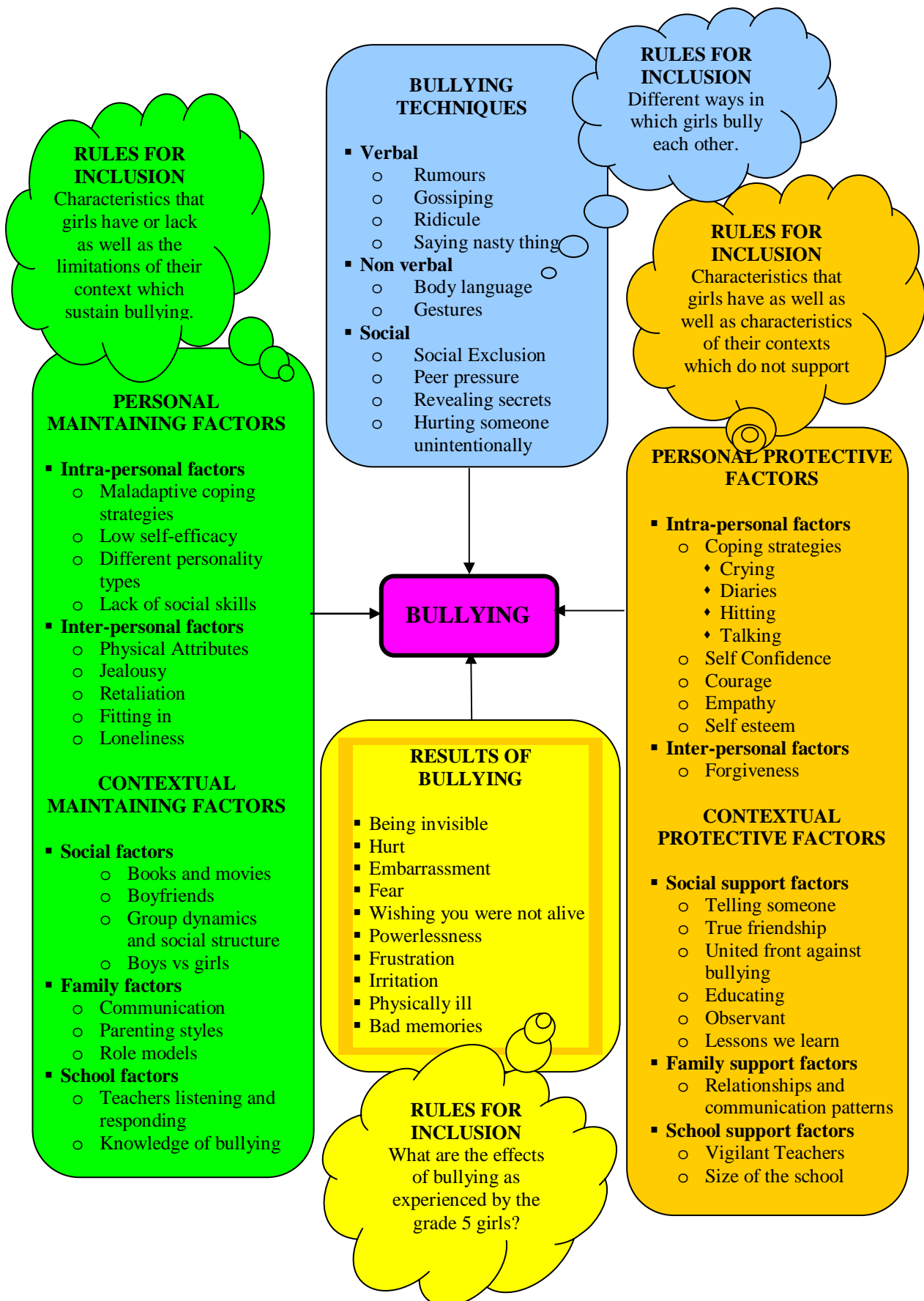What are the effects of bullying as experienced by the grade 5 girls?

Figure 3.19: Categories and rules for inclusion

3.8 ETHICS

Due to the sensitive nature of this research, various ethical issues needed to be considered. These issues included **the influence of the researcher** on the collection of data, the **informed consent/assent** of participants, creating a space of **trust** and **safety**, the **developmental status** of the participants, the **social responsibility** of the researcher and **confidentiality** and **anonymity**.

As the meanings created by participants in the research are mediated through **the researcher**, who is the primary instrument in the collection and analysis of data, the researcher has to be aware of the ways in which she may influence this process. The researcher brings to the process her own biases which may impact on the study. She has to be aware of them in order to monitor "as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data" (Merriam, 2002:5). That is also why it was important to state my ontology and epistemology clearly.

In the case of the Grade 5 participants, written **consent** was requested from parents/guardians. In order that they not feel pressured to participate, and even though written consent was obtained, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw and were asked whether they would like to participate (Pellegrini, 1998). Informed consent and **assent** should include the explanation of both risks and benefits to the participant. Protecting participants also implies not exploiting them. For this reason it was explained that the results of the research would not be used for the benefit of the researcher only, but also for the benefit of the participant. The benefit for the participant would be that this research would help to make the problems of the participants and other girls in the grade more visible. The results would also be used to assist the school in developing policies which would improve the situation in which many girls at this school find themselves and in this way make the participants a crucial part of the solution (Rubin, 2005). The researcher remained aware of the fact that the cognitive capacity of these participants to understand the risks and benefits of the study could be a reflection of their **developmental status** and level of vulnerability. Explaining the above in detail to participants helps a researcher to "create an environment of openness and **trust**" (Kelly, in TerreBlanche et al., 2006:297) within which the participants are able to express themselves authentically. Creating an environment of trust and openness is critical in establishing rapport in a qualitative study.

The **social responsibility** of the researcher also includes the need to report potentially risky behaviour. Guidelines as to what type of behaviour would be considered risky and necessary to report, should be established with the teacher in the school as suggested by Pepler and Craig (1995, cited in Pellegrini, 1998). The researcher also has a responsibility, particularly regarding the victim, in the discussion of this sensitive issue of bullying. "Care should be taken when interviewing them about their status as victim" (Pellegrini, 1998:173) and debriefing, as well as providing methods of empowerment, would be an important part of the process. In this study it was explained to the participants, at the outset of the research, that if I considered any of their behaviour as potentially risky, it would be my responsibility to help them access the necessary support. Therefore, when one of the participants reported self-injurious behaviour, I had a private discussion of the risks of this behaviour with her and the need to inform her mother (a single parent). Her mother was called in and appropriate support was discussed.

Confidentiality and **anonymity** was defined in terms of the limitations set out above. The identities of all participants, including the school, were to remain confidential in all discussions of findings. "… confidentiality should also apply to photos portraying persons or places" (Ryen, in Seale et al., 2004:221). Bearing this aspect in mind, the photographs selected for this thesis were carefully chosen so as not to reveal the identity of the setting or participants.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explained the process of inquiry, which includes the paradigm used for the research, the methodology used, the role of and the ethics of the researcher. It hopefully has also given an indication of the complex, flexible nature of qualitative research and the need for adaptability on the part of the researcher. More importantly, it is hoped that the use of the qualitative design in highlighting the concerns of bullying at this school will prove to be effective.

CHAPTER 4

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The book by Lewis Carroll about the adventures of Alice in Wonderland may appear to be an unusual metaphor to use when discussing research findings. However, I use this in retaliation to Rigby whose views appear to give less credibility to using the views and perceptions of children when he states:

> Yet it is not impossible to find serious researchers who believe that by not accepting a child's view of what a word means – for whatever purpose – one is somehow trampling on the inalienable Rights of the Child … We seem to be in Lewis Carroll country (Rigby, 2002:49).

Contrary to what Rigby believes, I feel that there is a case for using the perspectives of pupils. I would therefore concur with the views of Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen (2004:348) who maintain that "only through hearing and interpreting the stories of others through interviews can the evaluator learn the multiple realities and perspectives that different groups and individuals bring to an object or experience" (The ontology and epistemology of my study. See Section 3.2.) If one does research from the perspective of the expert, the data received is not based on direct experience (Flutter et al., 2004). By using the perspectives of pupils we are able to see what they consider important as they are the experts of their own lives. These 'realities' are important when considering intervention strategies as it is these 'perceived realities' which give shape and meaning to people's lives (Flutter et al., 2004:6). Experts may waste their time and energy on concerns they consider as significant and essential, while they are based on an outsider's view and may have little relevance to the experiences of those on the inside. Using the expertise of those on the inside will therefore help identify the issues that need to receive closer attention (Flutter et al., 2004).

The text which follows provides the interpretation of the present research, which is illustrated in Fig. 4.1. The findings have been categorised according to person, process and context factors and this has facilitated a link with Bronfenbrenner's

theory, already discussed in Chapter 1. The category headings have been adapted from Alan Carr's contextual approach (2006). Each category is discussed in detail with reference to the responses of the participants. As mentioned in Chapter 3, quotations from the various participants have been referenced accordingly.[3] The chapter ends with a conclusion before the discussion of the interpretation of the findings is presented in Chapter 5.

4.2 BULLYING TECHNIQUES

As explained in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, many researchers have attempted to define bullying. Rigby (2002) and Olweus (1993) focussed on the imbalance of power. Olweus (1993) added negative verbal or physical actions, the use of gestures or exclusion from social groups. On examining the various bullying techniques described by the participants in this study, these techniques were subcategorised into three sections: verbal, non verbal and social bullying. This confirms the findings of Crick and Grotpeter (1995) and Cairns (1994 cited in Xie et al., 2002) (see Section 1.1).

4.2.1 Verbal bullying techniques

According to the participants in the research, girls are targeted through **rumours, gossiping, ridicule and saying nasty things**. According to some of the participants, girls would start **rumours** to oust other girls from a group. A type of rumour that was mentioned often concerned one of a group of friends being told that one of the other girls in the group did not like the members of the group anymore. This would hurt the feelings of the group and the result would be that they ignored the 'culprit'. When speaking about **gossiping,** one of the participants spoke about girls visiting one another and being very friendly while visiting. However, when they got back to school they would say nasty things about the visited home to the rest of the group to boost themselves within the group. The following extract illustrates this:

> P: They like go to their houses and say your bedroom is very unneat – like my bedroom is … Maybe if you like invite friends to come and play like for the first time they've been there, they don't really like your house or room, they think it's not nice and they go tell their friends (T3P14L675).

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[3] E.g. T3P9L312 (T= transcript, 3 = transcript number, P = page, 9 = page number, L = line and 312 = line number). Quotations from participants are also prefixed by the letter **P** while words from the interviewer are in bold print**.**

The most common incident of **ridicule** mentioned by the participants concerned being laughed at by others when making the simplest of mistakes. Another concerned the insults participants had to endure. One participant shared a story about a dancing class she attended to illustrate this:

> P: Like um, I do dancing right and this one girl, she said, because I was a little bit plump she said I couldn't dance, because there was this like one move where you had to do a body rock she's like, you can't dance because you've got a big stomach (T7P4L180-184).

Finally, the **nasty things** girls say to each other either are intended to humiliate or have that result. Saying 'nasty things' sometimes also occurs in retaliation to being called names by someone else. The intent is then to be one better, which means that what is said has to be nastier. One of the participants related this example:

> P: Maybe this bully is calling you names and you can think of something more humiliating or maybe threatening or something like her parents had a divorce and you're like "Ah, you don't have a dad"(T4P4L157-160).

These verbal techniques resulted in some of the feelings presented in Figure 4.1. It includes feelings of wanting to be invisible, feelings of embarrassment, of feeling hurt, of wishing you were not alive, of powerlessness, irritation, being physically ill and creates bad memories which are revisited. These results will be discussed in greater detail in Section 4.3.

4.2.2 Non-verbal bullying techniques

The focus groups also spoke of girls using **body language** and **gestures** to express their disdain for someone. **Body language** would include actions like rolling your eyes at someone or using your facial expression to show your dislike of/disgust with someone. One of the participants explained it in the following way:

> P: Yeah, you can. Like your facial expression, like, say you're talking to like, say you're talking to like someone that you know and they know someone too and they're like, use their body language and they're like, why you talking to her, you can't talk to her she's like my friend, not yours (3P14L689-709).

Gestures specifically included hand signals. One of the participants explained two of the hand signals being used. Pointing your thumb and index finger and placing it on

your forehead to make the letter 'L' would indicate the word "loser" and pointing your thumb downwards would indicate "that you're dumb".

Although it seemed as if these non-verbal techniques did not have as great an effect as the verbal techniques, they still reverberated negatively within participants, as they regarded them as important enough to mention during the sessions.

4.2.3 Social bullying techniques

This type of bullying can be described in terms of **social exclusion**, being **pressurised by peers**, **revealing secrets,** and **hurting someone unintentionally**.

In terms of **social exclusion**, participants spoke of girls being excluded from birthday parties or being ignored when new friends joined groups. Being excluded also occurs when girls are asked to form groups for class discussions, group projects or fundraising activities held by the school, e.g. the annual dance-a-thon. At times, the exclusion would be done subtly, while it was blatant at other times as in being told, "Oh go away! We can't let you in to the group!" One of the participants sadly told her story of not being asked to join a group for dance-a-thon. She told of having to listen to her 'friends' while they excitedly planned what they would be wearing and where they would be getting together to discuss their plans. Girls were also capable of using exclusion as a threat and thereby exerting power over each other. This was explained by one of the participants in the following way:

> P: But some girls just say, if you're going to be in a group you have to be
> mean and I find that a bit of a threat (2P14L689-690).

Being **pressurised by peers** to do or say things they would not normally do or say was another factor mentioned by the participants. The participants not only used the threat to describe this type of behaviour, they spoke of it in terms of bribery. As one of the participants related:

> P: … when this really, really popular girl comes to you and says, "Okay
> you can be with me" so it's almost like she's bribing you (2P12L564-567).

Another manner in which girls exerted power over each other was through **secrets**. They would sometimes use secrets to exclude someone ("*something happened in the group and they didn't want to tell her*" 1P1L47-48) or they would use secrets against each other. The participants explained that a secret was something they

shared with their very best friends. However, such a 'secret' could be used as a weapon against them. If, for one reason or another, the friendship broke up, the 'best friend' would sometimes share the secret with others. This would have the effect of exposing vulnerabilities, which places the vulnerable girl at risk of being bullied. It also has other negative emotional effects for the girl who is exposed. One of the participants had this to say:

> P: … when her friends started hearing about this [the secret] she [the vulnerable girl] started crying and actually wasn't too happy about this and her ex-friend actually broke her heart (1P10L477).

It was also noted in the sessions with the focus groups that girls occasionally **hurt each other unintentionally**. They do not seem to realise that their actions have negative repercussions. One could explain this in terms of some girls lacking empathy and thereby being unable to see the hurt they cause. One of the participants explained how angry someone had made her by forcing themselves on her and a friend who wanted to be alone. When relaying this story, the participant did not seem to realise that her actions may have caused hurt as well.

> P: I wanted to play with S …, but J … was always around and I wanted to just play alone with her [S …] and whenever we asked her [J …] to just go away because we wanted to play for just one day, she cried to the teacher and the teacher would shout at us for not letting her play with us (5P6L261-266).

This notion of unintentional hurting supports the term 'non-malign' bullying, which was researched by Rigby (2002), as mentioned in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2 What is bullying?).

If the responses of the focus groups in terms of bullying techniques[4] were to be summarised, one would have two categories of bullying with an intent to hurt: **Intentional** and **unintentional**. Both categories include verbal abuse, the use of gestures, social abuse and the idea of power. A large part of bullying included exclusion. One could therefore assume that, because exclusion was mentioned so often as a threat, this could be one of the greatest fears of these girls in Grade 5. This could be due to their age and the developmental phase in which they find

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[4] This fulfils the expectation discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2: a shared understanding of what bullying is to the participants.

themselves, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (Section 1.7 The Significance of Age). During this developmental stage, it is generally accepted that the power of the peer group increases as the power of the care-giver decreases. The need for friendship is emphasised by a need for belonging to a certain group, which has an influence on her sense of self (Newman & Newman, 2003). One participant expressed her thoughts on bullying in the form of the following poem, which was based on a photograph of one of the areas that the participants identified as an area in which bullying occurred frequently.

JAIL

Bullying is like jail in 3 ways:
One way is you feel like you are trapped
Another way is it's dark, cold and lonely.
The last way is you feel heartsore.

I was bullied by a girl at the gate.
It felt like she had taken a fork and stabbed me
IT HURTS!
And it won't go away …

Figure 4.1: Photograph of an identified area of bullying at the school

4.3 MAINTAINING FACTORS

The fear of exclusion that is mentioned above makes it possible for bullying to survive in this setting. Once it was established that bullying existed as a problem in the school, it was important to see how, according to the participants, this problem was maintained. The maintaining factors that were identified were categorised into **personal** and **contextual** factors.

4.3.1 Personal maintaining factors

The concept of personal maintaining factors relates to factors that exist within and between girls that help to maintain bullying in this setting. The subheading personal maintaining factors was further categorised into intra- and inter-personal factors. Intra-personal factors are characteristics that girls either possess or lack, which help to maintain bullying in the setting of this study. Inter-personal factors on the other

hand, are those characteristics that relate to the relationships between girls. These provided the reasons they would use to justify the bullying they practised or witnessed.

4.3.1.1 *Intra-personal factors*

The following themes were included in this category: **maladaptive coping strategies**, **low self-efficacy, differing personalities of bullies and victims**, and **lack of social skills,**

The participants considered bullying to be the result of **maladaptive coping strategies**. Two of the participants expressed this idea in the following way:

> P: Ja and they're just trying to express their feelings on everybody else, but they should be talking to someone and expressing their feelings like that instead of bullying people (T5P4L164-166).

> P: And um that person now was full of rage and just couldn't hold it in anymore and instead of just getting revenge maybe they should just talk to someone (T2P5L225-227).

When discussing coping behaviour, John Archer (2001) also spoke of it in terms of the bully, and described aggressive behaviour as a deviant manner in which pupils coped with their social environment. This is supported by Carney and Merrell (2001) who extended the previous idea by saying that pupils learnt their maladaptive coping style from their parents. However, I think that this may not be the only reason but that interaction between a number of systems should be considered (see Section 4.3.2).

Aside from being a means of generally expressing emotions like loneliness, other maladaptive coping strategies could also include retaliation. The participants spoke of being destructive to release pent-up negative energy. This destructiveness was not related to objects only, but also involved self-injurious behaviour. Such maladaptive coping styles could result from pupils feeling overwhelmed by their circumstances and their desire for adult-driven intervention (section 2.6). **Low self-efficacy** was also mentioned by the participants as a factor that increased the chances of being targeted. This supports Gamliel's research (2003) which was mentioned in Chapter 2. He described victims as pupils who lacked the spirit to fight back. As one of the participants aptly put it: "… they're too sad to complain".

The participants also spoke of the different **personality types** of bullies and victims. Words like "soft", "sad", "withdrawn" and "shy" were used to describe girls susceptible to bullying. This is supported in the literature about victims in which they are described as submissive/passive (Olweus, 1993). Girls who were considered bullies were described as girls who lacked respect for others, which resulted in them treating people badly. They were also described as girls who were "vain", "overconfident", who "blamed others" for their mistakes and girls who were so "sly" they were able to escape reprimand. Some girls were also accused of having highly inflated opinions about themselves. As expressed by one participant:

> P: Also the word cute, um, bullies just think they're perfect and they're fabulous and they're beautiful, but actually they're not. Everything they think they are they're not. Actually the person that they're bullying usually is most of those things. And then they hang around all the boys and they think they're absolutely fabulous, but they're not. (Laughter) (T5P3L124-129).

Figure 4.2:
This collage portrays how the girls of one particular focus group saw bullies

Some bullies were described as bossy, as one participant explained:

> P: The way you can identify a bully, maybe you could see if she like bosses everyone around, 'you go there! You go there!" or things like that. Or they say "give me" or this and that. And push everyone out the way" (T10P5L242-245).

Girls who bullied were also described as girls who did not follow social norms or cues, whether this was intentional or unintentional. In the words of one of the participants: "I just think that some people are rude and they don't think before they speak "(T10P1L6-7). This could lead to the assumption that girls who bully **lack social skills**. However, as mentioned in Chapter 2 (Section 2.5.1 The Bully), bullies use their understanding of social situations to manipulate their victims (Carney, 2001).

4.3.1.2   Inter-personal factors

Included in this subcategory were the following themes: **physical attributes, jealousy, retaliation, fitting in** and **loneliness.** One of the participants explained **physical attributes** in the following way:

> P: Sometimes if people are quite chubby or something, then people would start teasing them and say that they're fat and they're ugly and then that's one of the ways that they get bullied (T5P7L352-355).

These sentiments were echoed in a separate interview with a different focus group:

> P: Sometimes people judge the book by its cover. They look at someone and they say: 'yo you're ugly, your hairstyle's ridiculous or you're fat, you're too tall or you're too short or your freckles are horrible' or something and it actually really hurts inside (T11P1L11-15).

The physical nature of maintaining factors included illnesses. Illnesses that the participants mentioned included anything they considered contagious: "… she was sick and that sickness can spread and they just don't really want to be around …" (T1P1L39-41). This is contrary to the research done by Carney and Merrell (2001), which states that external deviation as a cause for bullying is merely a myth. However, it supports research done by Gamliel, Hoover, Daughtry and Imbra (2003) in which one of the participants in that research noted that victims tended to be either short or fat.

Many of the participants spoke of pupils who had more material possessions than others and the **jealousy** that resulted from this. This was demonstrated during an interview when one of the participants was explaining how jealous she was of one of the girls because of all her material possessions. One of the possessions she mentioned was a cell phone and one of the other participants interjected with, "You should have stopped at the cell phone because you don't even have one yet" (T2P6L283,284). Jealousy also resulted from physical attributes e.g. "… my body is just a good shape and they're jealous …" (T7P3L126-127). One of the participants spoke about her perspective on jealousy and the power it has:

> P: I think jealousy and envy in a way, it's like fungus. Because once you start … Or it's like drugs. Once you start you're addicted. It's exactly like drugs (T7P4L160-162).

Jealousy and the resultant gossiping were researched by Owens (2000) as the type of aggression/bullying used against popular girls. According to Owens (2000), the result of this technique was loss of self-esteem as popularity waned.

The participants explained how they would bully others in **retaliation** to the bullying they experienced. A participant described it in a nutshell:

> P: This girl bothers me in class and says I'm stupid and then I go and say it back to her (T6P5L220).

This statement supported research by Pellegrini (1998), on submissive versus provocative victims (Section 2.5.2). He had stated that provocative victims differ from bullies in that their aggression is reactive, not instrumental. This means that they react aggressively when being bullied.

Loneliness was another possible cause that participants attributed to bullying. They surmised that some girls may force themselves on friendship groups because they have no friends. They then also do not have the appropriate skills to make friends in a socially acceptable way. One of the participants described the actions of another girl in the following way:

> P: I think it was maybe a bit of loneliness because she didn't really have a lot of friends, but because she didn't have a lot of friends, she was trying to make people play with her. She didn't really have any friends (T5P5L210-213).

The above characteristics represent the personal characteristics which contribute to maintaining bullying within this context. However, there are also contextual factors that play a role.

4.3.2 Contextual maintaining factors

Carr (2006:54) explains contextual maintaining factors in the following way: "While personal characteristics may pre-dispose youngsters to develop psychological problems and maintain them once they emerge, a variety of contextual factors also make youngsters vulnerable to developing psychological difficulties and play a significant role in perpetuating such problems". In this study, the psychological problems referred to by Carr are translated as bullying. The contextual factors mentioned by the participants were many and for easier management have been placed under subheadings, namely; social factors, family factors and school factors. Context is a central concept in Bronfenbrenner's theory. The previous three subheadings would relate to the systems in his theory in the following manner: peer group, family and school systems respectively.

4.3.2.1 Social factors

Included in this subcategory were the following themes: **books and movies, boyfriends, group dynamics and social structure,** and **boys versus girls.**

One of the social factors which came to the fore during the interviews was the lessons learnt by girls through **books and movies**. These were not necessarily the lessons which would prevent bullying but which, instead, taught girls skills for bullying more effectively. One of the participants related an excerpt from one of the books she was reading at the time:

> P: The book that I'm reading at the moment. Her name (the main character) is Linda Bates. Um she like. 'Cause in the morning, she's very popular and in the morning she writes a list of her friends of the day and then someone who are her truly best friends get knocked off the list either by number one: you're not really my friend and number 10 is like you're like the main person in the group. And she would like pass around this list, she'd pass it to all the girls in the class and if you weren't on that thing you'd like basically start crying (T2P14L694-702).

Two of the movies mentioned were "Mean Girls" and "Thirteen". The participants unfortunately were unable to remember the titles of the books they had read. Carney and Merrell (2003) suggested that books and movies focusing on the thematic

content should actually be used to help with the prevention of bullying. Based on the responses of the participants, it became clear that class discussion would have to be monitored so that pupils took the message of anti-bullying with them instead of ideas on how to bully more effectively.

Boyfriends also seem to be a huge influence on maintaining bullying amongst girls of this age and were mentioned often. Having a boyfriend was often linked to maintaining one's position in the group of friends or was considered a prerequisite for belonging to a group. The participants also spoke of girls feeling "pressurised" to have a boyfriend. They spoke of girls being "scared" of "losing their position" in a group if they did not have a boyfriend. They also spoke of popular girls having the power to "take away a boyfriend" from someone. In her thesis on bullying, Thayser (2001) related the responses of a participant in her research who spoke on the theme of boyfriends being stolen (However, I was unable to find other literature on the topic).

Not only choosing boyfriends, but choosing friends generally also results in predicaments for girls. This brings **group dynamics** and **social structure** into the picture. When speaking of group dynamics and social structure, the participants spoke of a loose hierarchical structure which existed in the school. The different groups they spoke of were: *The Plastics, The Wannabees, The Average Girls, The Fat Girls* and *The Losers (*also known as *The Average Geeks).* At the top of the hierarchy was the group they termed *The Plastics*. These girls were characterised as being the popular girls. They were described as girls who thought of themselves as perfect, but were considered "mean" by others. On the fringes of this group was a group who were "not completely popular". They were termed the *Wannabees* as they wanted to belong to the Plastics but just did not make the grade. Then there was a group that the participants called the *Average Girls*. These girls were considered to be thoughtful and were described in terms opposite to the shallowness mentioned when they spoke of the "Plastics". *The Fat Girls* were ridiculed by the two groups at the top of the hierarchy. Many of them had little self-esteem and were easy targets for bullying. The participants also spoke of a group of girls they called *The Losers*. These girls often were targets of bullying and displayed the reactions mentioned above as characteristics of victims. One of the participants described *The Loser* as "the lowest kind".

Dominance hierarchy, as it is called in the literature, was considered one of the instrumental goals of aggressive pupils (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). The hierarchy that exists in the setting of this study is illustrated in the diagram in Figure 4.3, below.
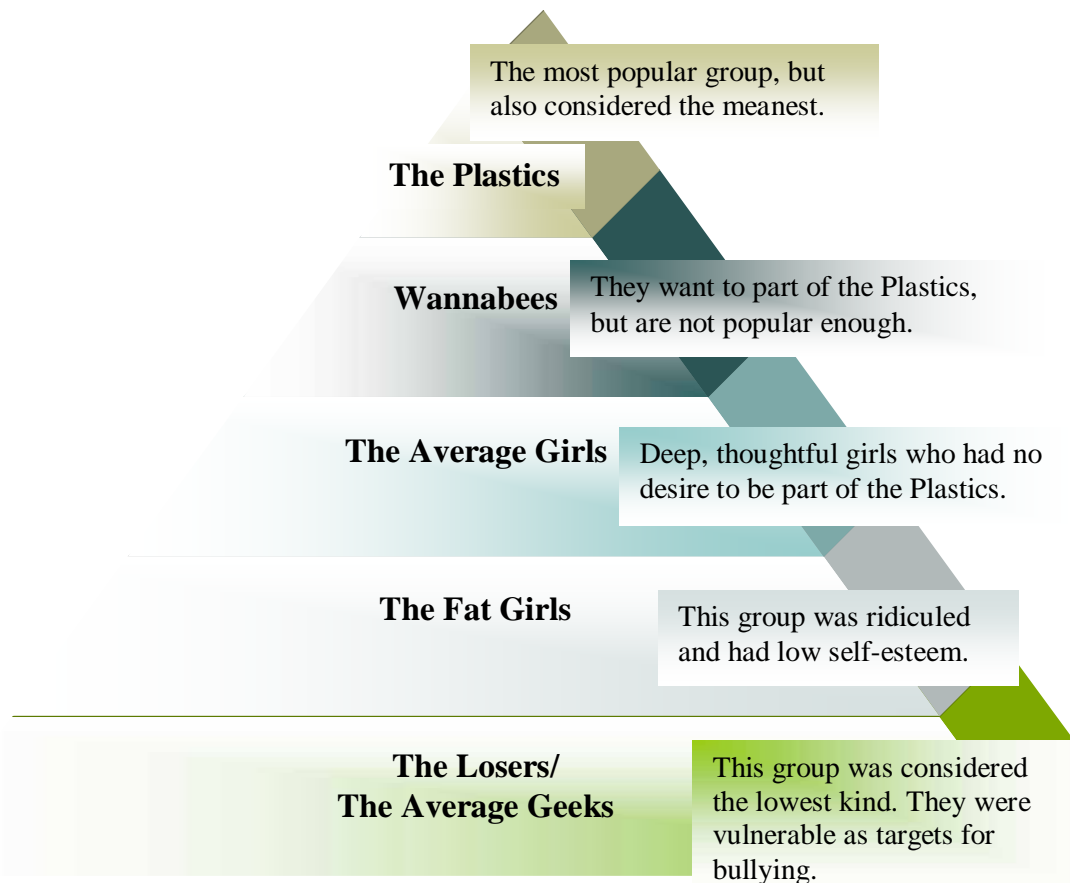
The most popular group, but also considered the meanest.

The Plastics

Wannabees They want to part of the Plastics, but are not popular enough.

The Average Girls Deep, thoughtful girls who had no desire to be part of the Plastics.

The Fat Girls This group was ridiculed and had low self-esteem.

**The Losers/
The Average Geeks** This group was considered the lowest kind. They were vulnerable as targets for bullying.

Figure 4.3: The Dominance Hierarchy of this study

Besides the difficulties that girls experience with other girls, they also experience difficulties with boys. This relates to boys being unable to keep secrets (according to the participants) and the increased embarrassment caused to girls when boys laugh at them.

4.3.2.2   Family factors

The subcategory of family factors relates to characteristics of families, particularly parents, and relationships within families which contribute to maintaining bullying. These proximal interactions include the following themes: **communication, parenting styles,** and **role models**.

According to the participants, **parents** play a huge role in the emotional wellbeing of their **children** and are vital factors in influencing them in the context of bullying. The manner in which parents **communicate** with each other, with other parents, with teachers and with their children, all play a role. The manner in which parents listen and respond to the problems presented by their daughters were further issues that were discussed. Many parents were described as not listening effectively to what their daughters were saying. Some were described as preoccupied. Some were described as being so vague in their responses that their daughters were unable to understand them or were left wondering whether their parents had really understood them. Some parents intervened against the wishes of their daughters.

This mainly had to do with the inability of parents to effectively deal with the problem of bullying, particularly when they display their frustration by "screaming" at each other, at teachers or at other parents. This method was described in puzzlement by one of the participants:

> P: My dad always took his anger out on the teacher and I don't know why (T7P2L71-72).

This hostile and abusive **parenting style** was described in research undertaken by Wilson (2003) and Pellegrini (1998:65) in the following way: "An authoritarian parenting style has also been empirically linked to the personal characteristics of aggressive victims." Sometimes parents were considered to be *disinterested* when it came to the affairs of their children, while other parents were regarded as *over-involved*. The former type included the parent that participants described as more focussed on other things, like "television" or their own thoughts. One of the participants described an outing with her mother:

> P: I went to the shops with my mom and at lunch I was telling my mom about somebody, a boy that likes to bully people, and then she like says "who is he?" And I'm like, "oh I told you for the seventh time". And she's like, "Oh, did you? Maybe you should tell your father; maybe he'll be a bit more interested." I'm like "Mom this is serious, it's serious you know". And she's like, "Ok I'll listen" (T6P2L82-88).

The latter type of enmeshed family was researched by Wilson (2003) and was described as most often being representative of parents of physically slight pupils who were average to below average achievers. It is interesting that the participant who made the following remark about her over-involved parents was physically slight

compared to the rest of the grade and an average achiever, according to her teacher.

> P: Parents butt in a lot when they should just stay away. They really, really do and it's really, really irritating (T5P5L250-254).

According to the participants, parents were also seen as **role models** in terms of maintaining bullying. One mom was described as having punched another mom after they verbally abused each other. This once again supports research conducted by Wilson (2003) and Pellegrini (1998) who stated that exposure to parents who use power assertive strategies teaches children that aggression can be used instrumentally.

4.3.2.3   *School factors*

The role of the school and more specifically the teachers was considered as similarly important by the participants. This subcategory included the following themes: **listening and responding** and **knowledge of bullying**. The manner in which they **listened and responded** to pupils, as well as provided possible solutions were also mentioned. The participants spoke of teachers responding quickly to physical bullying while regarding the non-physical bullying among girls as less important, as their response is less prompt. The participants also mentioned the problems girls faced when they reported bullying incidents to teachers. Often teachers would tell them to "sort out the problem" themselves. This was regarded as a big problem by the participants, because, by the time the child complained to the teacher, other avenues had already been tried unsuccessfully. The teacher would therefore be their last resort as they were sometimes labelled 'tattle-talers' when complaining to a teacher or teachers would not give serious consideration to their concern and they would just be brushed off. The mood of the teacher also influenced the response to the girls, which meant that teachers' behaviour was unpredictable and made them less approachable. Consequently, the participants felt that teachers did not really know how to deal with the issues effectively. As expressed by one of the participants:

> P: They don't take it seriously because sometimes when someone comes to complain, like the first few times a teacher's ever heard people come complain, it's for very little things and then the teacher starts thinking, oh my word, they're just coming to complain about very little things, but, um,

sometimes it's actually big later in life and the teacher just says go sort out your own problems, stop tittle taling, stop doing this, but in a way they're very, it is serious. They must let the person talk to see if it's serious or not. They must let the person that's coming to tell the teacher what is it about and then, ja they'll say like if it's just someone who's got just little paper cuts on his finger or cut his whole finger off (T10P9L418-430).

Listening and responding were themes relating to both parents and teachers. In their study on bullying, Soutter and McKenzie (2000) encouraged parents and teachers to listen to whatever children have to say about bullying and to avoid put-downs or shaming as responses. Cowie and Olafsson (2000) also emphasised the teaching of active listening skills in anti-bullying support programmes.

Some of the girls felt that teachers were not properly informed about the seriousness of the different types of bullying, or about the fact that different types of bullying actually existed. This supports Craig's (2000) findings which resulted in him calling for the education of teachers with regard to the diversity of bullying behaviour. The theme of **knowledge of bullying** is also shared with the category of family factors. However, the literature seems to be focussed on the education of teachers, not parents. It would therefore appear that this could be one of the gaps in the data on bullying.

The multiplicity and variety of maintaining factors mentioned by the participants present many avenues and opportunities for intervention. The results of bullying as described by the participants will be discussed first.

4.4 RESULTS OF BULLYING

The effects of bullying were many and varied. The painful psychological effects noted by Owens, Slee and Shute (2000:367) "included feelings of: embarrassment, anger, worry, fear, humiliation, loneliness, self-consciousness, betrayal and sadness". The participants in this study spoke of the following consequences: **being made to feel invisible, being hurt, being embarrassed, fear, wishing they were not alive, powerlessness, frustration, becoming physically ill,** and **experiencing bad memories.**

The feelings of being ignored could apparently be so strong that it **made one feel invisible**. The participants spoke of it in the following way:

P: … you're like a ghost. (T5P9L457)

Here the theme of invisibility is in contrast with the same theme as found in one of Thayser's (2001) investigations. In Thayser's study invisibility emerged as a means of survival while, in this study, it was not the participants who tried to become invisible, but others who forced it on them.

They also mentioned being **hurt** so often that you start believing the nasty things others are saying about you to be true. **Embarrassment** was another effect of bullying, as the bullying act would hurt so much that one would be inclined to cry, but this would merely compound the act as everyone would then consider you to be weak. Participants in Carney's study (2000) spoke of the embarrassment sometimes being as bad as the actual confrontation. Sometimes the effect of having people laugh at you or losing friends would become so bad that girls would start wishing that they were **not alive**.

Fear resulting from bullying was also mentioned, as girls would start feeling too scared to move around the school on their own for fear of being targeted. "… if you are bullied then you're very afraid to go anywhere alone" (T5P10L471-473). Safety in numbers was considered a real solution. Carney and Merrell (2001) noted that most pupils who experienced bullying feared school and were at risk of truancy and eventually dropping out. Owens et al. (2000) spoke of victims and bystanders feeling fear. The former feared that the bullying would never end and the latter that they might also be targeted.

The participants spoke of being made to feel **powerless**. One of the participants explained this powerlessness as follows: "She would just take control and I couldn't say anything about it" (T5P5L204). Another participant expressed her sense of powerlessness in a collage (Figure 4.4). She stated the following:

P: Sometimes when a girl bullies you it feels like you actually are the boxing bag because they can just hit you as many times and you can't hit them back (T5P1L5-7).
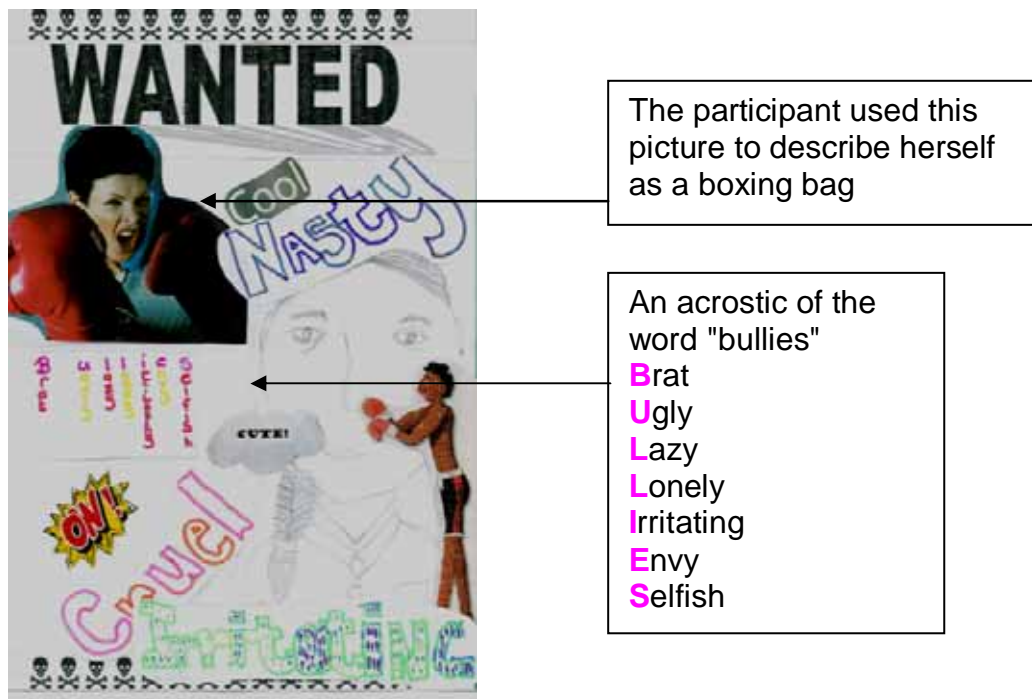
The participant used this picture to describe herself as a boxing bag

An acrostic of the word "bullies"
Brat
Ugly
Lazy
Lonely
Irritating
Envy
Selfish

Figure 4.4: A metaphor used by one of the participants when explaining her picture's use in a collage was that of a boxing bag

Feelings of powerlessness manifested in the victim and bystanders were also noted by Carney and Merrell (2001). Participants in Cowie and Olafsson's (2000) study regarded even adults as powerless against bullying behaviour.

Powerlessness also resulted in **frustration.** Gamliel (2003) noted that, besides confusion and anger, frustration was one of the feelings suffered by victims. The Grade 5 participants in this study explained how they would take out their frustration on themselves, others or their environment, through actions like slamming doors. One of the participants explained the frightening lengths girls could go to to give expression to their feelings of powerlessness and frustration:

> P: If I really get angry with other people I either cut my hand or cut my arm (T7P13L630-631).

> I would like force myself. I would take my scissors and go like that.

> I'd go to the bathroom and blame it on my brother if it's bleeding (T7P13L635-642).

Feeling **physically ill** was also mentioned as an effect of bullying. The physical symptoms mentioned were headaches and stomach-aches. This would result in girls losing out on school time as they would ask to be sent home. However, their symptoms were often not believed by staff or by other girls and they would have to suffer the further embarrassment of being accused of faking their illness.

Finally, the girls spoke of the **bad memories** generated by their experiences of bullying. One described it as a "stuck record" that played itself over and over again in her head. This supports research by Sharp, Thompson and Arora (2000) who spoke of memories of bullying incidents surfacing repeatedly as one of the most common negative reactions to bullying.

4.5 PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors involve factors that were recognised as those that protect girls against bullying. When discussing school climate, Freiberg and Stein (2002:356) said that it could either "foster resilience or become a risk factor in the lives of people who work and learn in a place called school" (cited in Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002). There are pupils who show resilience in the face of stress in spite of whatever type of bullying climate may exist at a school. The factors below were mentioned by the participants and express the resilience shown by some of the girls at the school. These factors could provide a basis for understanding areas within pupils and contexts that could be strengthened when speaking of intervention and prevention.

4.5.1 Personal Protective Factors

This category, like the category of maintaining factors, has also been subdivided into intra- and inter-personal factors (see Section 4.2.1).

4.5.1.1 Intra-personal factors

Intra-personal factors that were highlighted included: **positive coping strategies**, **self-confidence, courage, empathy** and **self-esteem.**

One of the factors mentioned by the girls was **positive coping strategies** which they applied to help them cope with the nastiness they sometimes had to face at school. In their research, Gamliel, Hoover, Daughtry and Imbra (2003) identified the following as coping strategies employed by participants in their research: avoidance or ignoring the bully, rational or calm confrontation, verbal retaliation and cathartic

expression. The participants in this study spoke of **crying** to release the built-up tension. Smith and Shu (2000) mentioned crying as one of the less successful strategies. Horowitz et al. (2004) found that crying, amongst other responses, actually led to more bullying. In the present study, the Grade 5 participants spoke of crying, not as a means to end the bullying, but as a means of allowing themselves to feel better. They also spoke of writing down their emotions in their **diaries** or physically **hitting** something which was not harmful to themselves or others. Another coping mechanism they mentioned was **talking** to someone. One participant mentioned that the sessions that we had had also helped because it had given them the opportunity to express their angst and helped release pent-up emotions.

Having **self-confidence** and **courage** were also considered to be protective factors. Having courage was another aspect that many of the participants experienced as daunting. One of them did note that it was the fact that it was not easy which made it so noble. They explained that people who displayed self-confidence and courageousness were people who stood up for themselves and others and did not allow others to be on their own at break time. Salmivalli et al. (1999) linked courage to self-esteem which was high and healthy. One of the participants mentioned that she was "too scared" to stand up to someone and would instead employ another method of ridding herself of the problem. The solution she mentioned was "starting a rumour about the person bullying her". In this way she would be able to move the focus away from herself.

According to Björkqvist (2001), **empathy** was found to be a crucial intervening variable. "… socially intelligent individuals scoring high on empathy tend to be good at conflict resolution" (Björkqvist et al., 2000, in Björkqvist, 2001:274). The participants also spoke of **empathy** – the ability to understand another person's point of view – as a protective factor. For them, having empathy meant being aware of those in distress and then offering support. As sessions progressed, girls started helping each other to see the other person's point of view. One of the participants offered the following explanation to another participant:

> P: Ma'am say you're busy dancing and say you're doing those stretching moves, the warm-ups, the dancing teacher's like, no you're doing the wrong thing, you must do what I tell you. Then you just want to take a break and you have to do knee spins and whenever you like just don't really do it, she's like, what was that. She says right I'm going to teach you

how to do the proper thing now and it's very hurt on your knees (T7P5L210-216).

P: From the dancing teacher's point of view. OK maybe the dance teacher needs to know that you have a knee problem. Have you ever thought some girls just don't want to do the step and then they just, they're good actresses you know and they just pretend. And now that poor teacher doesn't know whether you were pretending like the other girls or not, like my ballet teacher. There's this one girl in our class that never wants to do stretching. That never wants to work hard. But because she's got a bigger sister who dances, she always gets an A+. and I don't think it's fair because my ballet teacher, she really like tries to get her going, she's like a stubborn donkey, she just, she won't do anything. And then when I'm really feeling sick, she does it to me and when I'm home I end up like blah (Enacts vomiting) (T7P5L229-242).

Empathy does more than help pupils understand the experience of victimisation (Craig et al., 2000). While talking about empathy, the participants started viewing bullies in a different light, as girls who possibly needed sympathy. Two of the participants expressed this in:

P: … it helped me realise they're not just bullying because they want to be mean but they're also sometimes lonely (T9P1L9-11).

P: Maybe the bully's actually been hurt and she doesn't know what to do because maybe she's going through a very hard time with her family or with friends so to just show her emotions she just bullies people. So maybe she's just having a hard time, what Megan said earlier … to show her anger she's bullying people and then maybe she's in more pain than actually you are because she's just maybe feeling bad (T5P7L308-315).

The final personal protective factor mentioned by the participants was **self-esteem**. This was highlighted not only with reference to the fact that girls with high self-esteem did not feel the need to bully, but also with reference to the fact that one's self-esteem was negatively affected when one was bullied. One of the participants explained the result of bullying as not believing in yourself any more. This idea supports findings by Owens et al. (2000) who noted that girls' self-esteem was closely linked to interpersonal relationships. Bullying therefore resulted in loss of self-esteem for girls. Carney and Merrell (2001) saw low self-esteem as a major contributor to becoming a target for bullying. They therefore also considered it as a point in favour of intervention.

4.5.1.2   Inter-personal factors

Having the capacity to **forgive** was also considered to be a protective factor as it instilled harmony. However, because of the hurt that was caused, the difficulty to forgive was recognised. What was also recognised was the fact that 'friends' could take advantage if one just tended to forgive every infringement. Caution was therefore closely linked to forgiveness. I was unable to find literature on this idea as it pertains specifically to bullying and it would appear that this finding points to a possible gap in the literature on bullying.

4.5.2   Contextual protective factors

Participants mentioned factors within their environment which they felt prevented bullying to a certain degree in their group. The factors that were mentioned can be categorised into social, family and school support factors.

4.5.2.1   Social support factors

The themes in this subcategory included: **telling someone, true friendship, being united against bullying, educating pupils** and **being observant.**

The theme of **telling someone** was recognised by the participants as difficult for various reasons. The 'person' they would tell included family members and pets. As one of the participants explained:

> P: I'd go to my parents or I'd go to my sister, but I know it sounds kind of funny, but I'd also go to (laughing) my pet because that's someone you could share something with. They can't give you any answers back (laughter) (T2P13L639-642).

The difficulty with this approach was that not everybody had someone in whom they could confide. One participant mentioned how her source of support, a family friend, was not there any more as the parents of this family friend had had a fight with her parents. Depending on someone was therefore not always a safe option, as was the next protective factor mentioned – having a **true friend**. This was due to the fact that one should choose one's friends wisely, but even the greatest precautions in choosing a friend was still not safe as security was dependent on the other person. This difficulty of putting trust in peer relationships was recognised by Hodges, Boivin, Bukowski and Vitaro (1999), as shown in the following: "It seems that peer relationships may be a protective factor, subject to certain conditions. As long as the

friendship is not overly close, and the victimised child perceives a high level of protection emanating from the friend, the risk of being victimised reduces" (cited in Thayser, 2001:51). One of the participants spoke about it in terms of security. She said that choosing a true friend above a popular one was important as you felt safer with a true friend. In her words:

> P: It's more important to have a real friendship than be in a group that's just popular because you want to be the popularest girl, you just want to be in that group so that it makes you look like the best girl. I would rather go to a friend that really is a friend and doesn't backstab you, lie to you like all that's been done cause the popular group might bully you by emotional or physical. A real friend wouldn't do that (T2P18L874-881).

Another protective social factor was that of presenting a **united front against bullying**. Once again the virtues of being part of a group and experiencing safety in numbers, was emphasised.

> P: Maybe everybody stands up against the bully and nobody wants to play with that bully and the bully's left all alone (T4P4L182-183).

Being united against bullying addresses saturating the culture of the school with showing low tolerance of bullying. An article on research that was conducted by Dupper and Meyer-Adams (2002) argues that creating a positive school culture and climate would be one way of reducing low-level violence at schools. Each school has a culture that embodies its "values, norms and beliefs" (Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002:356). These authors recommend that school personnel become instrumental in creating intervention and prevention strategies which will change the culture and climate in schools.

Lastly, **educating** pupils about bullying and being **observant** enough to learn lessons from the experience of others was the final social support factors mentioned. Educating pupils about bullying related directly to the idea of unintentional bullying. It was thought that, if everyone was aware of what was regarded as bullying, there would be less chance of unintentional bullying occurring. Participants also felt that it would help them if they were observant about things happening around them and then learning from one another. If they saw someone being bullied, they could see which actions were effective in stopping the bullying. As one participant said:

P: You watch other people and you learn from their mistakes before you make it (T5P10L485).

4.5.2.2 Family support factors

The literature speaks of **parents** who often overlook and minimise the problem of bullying and its effects (Carney & Merrell, 2001). When mentioning factors which could be placed in this category the participants inadvertently spoke of **relationships and communication patterns** within their homes that were either supportive and made them feel safe and valued or was disinterested, making them feel that there was no one they could rely on. Some feel safe enough to speak to parents while others feel that parents do not understand because this type of bullying is beyond their context. This was explained by one of the participants:

P: It's hard for her [mother] to understand. When she was at school, I know there was the same thing, but I don't think it was as bad as it is now. So like what I really want her to do is like um … listen (T7P2L87-90).

Those who find it easy to speak to their parents spoke about the 'good advice' their parents would give them or said that their parents would take it further by speaking to the parents of the other pupils involved. In both instances, this type of intervention was felt to be useful. Others spoke of bullies explaining their behaviour to their parents in a calm, rational manner. This point demonstrated the growth of empathy in the group.

4.5.2.3 School support factors

Having teachers who are **vigilant**, particularly during break-time seemed to be important in preventing bullying. Another factor some participants felt seemed to help in the prevention of bullying at this school is its **size**. A few of the participants felt that the size of the school helped to hinder bullying as it was too small to really allow for any type of social hierarchy. The participants seemed to differ with each other in this regard as others distinctly experienced a social hierarchy. The idea of school size was contrary to Olweus (1997) who stated that "… size of the class or the school appears to be of negligible importance for the relative frequency or level of bully/victim problems" (cited in Carney & Merrell, 2001:371).

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has related the findings of the research, placing it into the various themes of bullying techniques, maintaining factors, results of bullying and protective factors. Some of these themes have been split further into smaller personal and contextual categories. An integration of the findings will follow in the next chapter. The reflections of the researcher as well as the impact of the process on the participants will also be explored. Ideas for further research are then suggested.

CHAPTER 5

INTEGRATION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an integration of the findings as discussed in Chapter 4, the theoretical framework as discussed in Chapter 1 and the model of perspectives as proposed in Chapter 2. As the research question is two-fold, concerning

- what the **perspectives** of Grade 5 girls with regard to non-physical bullying amongst girls are and

- how their perspectives can be utilised towards **intervention and prevention** of this phenomenon,

the interpretation which follows will include a discussion of the findings as related to the perspectives on non-physical bullying held by Grade 5 pupils, before discussing those findings that relate to intervention and prevention. An attempt will also be made to integrate the above with person, process and context factors which emerged during the analysis of the data, as stipulated in Bronfenbrenner's theory. A link is also made with the model presenting the perspectives explained in Chapter 2 as related to process, person and context factors, as well as the research question. The rest of the chapter will deal with the limitations of the study, suggestions for future research and the reflections of the researcher.

The following diagram is proposed as a representation of the integration mentioned above:
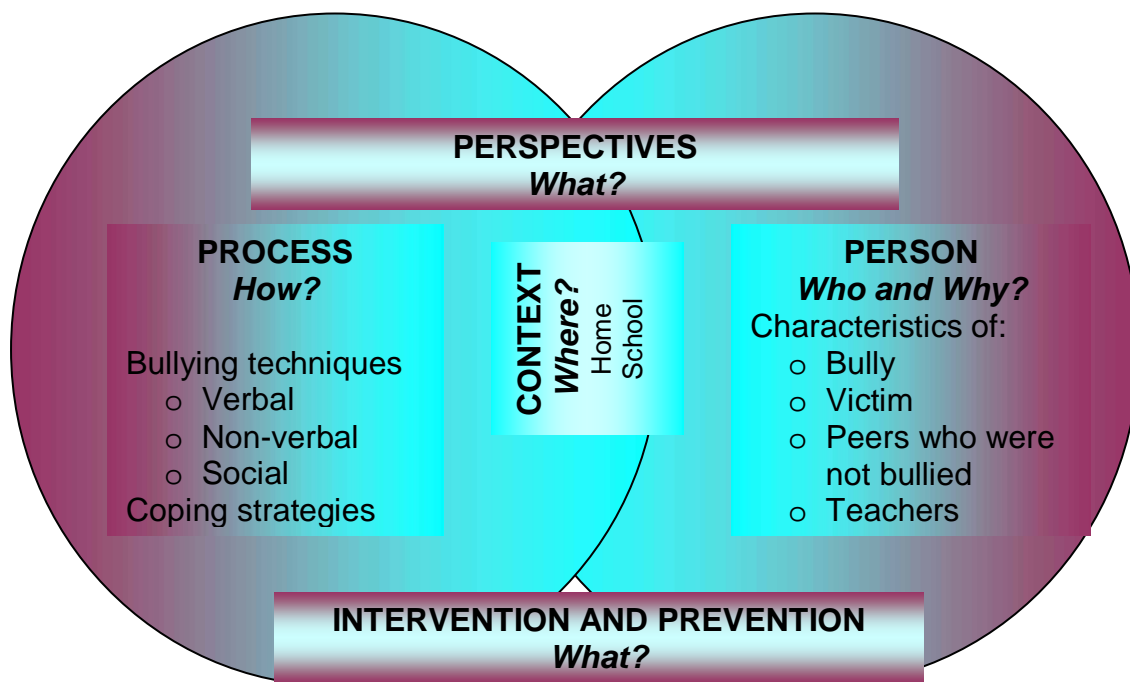

Figure 5.1:
Diagrammatic representation of the proposed integration between perspectives, factors and intervention and prevention

5.2 PERSPECTIVES

As discussed in Chapter 1 the findings of this research have been categorised according to person, process and context factors and this has facilitated a link with Bronfenbrenner's theory. Each of these factors will be discussed in terms of the findings of Chapter 4.

5.2.1 Process factors

Process factors included the bullying techniques used by these girls, their coping strategies as well as the effects of bullying. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the techniques used by girls can be categorised as verbal, non-verbal or social. This was non-physical bullying which largely has to do with relationships amongst peers and the concept of power. Participants indicated that, if bullying were to be rated in terms of which caused the most hurt, or which type of bullying they feared the most, *social exclusion* was mentioned most frequently. Bullying may also be *intentional or unintentional* with regard to the intent to hurt.

The *coping strategies* which participants spoke of were either *maladaptive* or *functional*. The maladaptive strategies that they mentioned included hurting themselves or others; taking revenge for a hurt caused and bullying in turn; developing physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches; and copying negative coping styles of parents, like becoming aggressive. Positive coping strategies included writing about feelings, physical exercise and being able to speak to someone, even if it was a pet.

The effects of bullying that were mentioned included short-term as well as long-term effects. Short-term effects were *being made to feel insignificant*, feeling hurt, being embarrassed and fearful, feeling irritated, being *made to feel powerless* and wishing that you were not alive. When speaking of long-term effects the participants spoke of having terrible recurring memories of bullying occurrences.

5.2.2 Person factors

Person factors included the role players in the bullying experience. The role players identified by these participants were bullies, victims, peers, teachers and parents. They also spoke of those who watched and would either lend support to the victim or laugh at her, thereby supporting the bully. The participants also associated the roles of bully and victim with certain characteristics. Whereas bullies were attributed with bossiness, over-confidence and slyness, victims were called soft, sad, withdrawn and shy. Physical attributes of victims were also mentioned as a factor which contributed towards targeting girls. These physical attributes ranged from being considered too fat or too thin to the colour of a victim's hair. Characteristics of children who were not bullied were also mentioned as a probable means of protection. These characteristics included: positive coping strategies like crying or writing about emotions in one's diary, having self-confidence and courage and being able to feel empathy. The ability to forgive was another factor mentioned, although this was closely linked to caution.

The idea of teachers as a source of help was discussed. It was reported that, although the help of teachers was greatly desired, it was not always forthcoming and also held with it the consequence of being labelled a tattle-tale, being seen as weak or as a nuisance. The lack of understanding displayed by teachers with regard to non-physical bullying was mentioned. The participants also spoke of the inability of

some teachers to recognise this type of bullying in the playground, and of their inefficient methods for dealing with it.

Parents were also seen as a source of help, but their effectiveness was also often seen as limited. Parents who were over-intrusive or authoritarian were considered less effective. Over-intrusive parents were therefore seen as those who disempowered their children and were the source of their lack of self-confidence and self-efficacy. Parents who listened and offered various types of solutions on the other hand, were considered the most effective, most supportive and most empowering.

5.2.3 Context factors

Context factors relate to the various contexts in which these Grade 5 girls find themselves; whether it is in the classroom, in the playground, at ballet practice or at home. One of the positive aspects that some participants mentioned with regard to the context of school was that the size of the school supported an anti-bullying atmosphere (section 4.5.2.4.). They felt that there was little space for a social hierarchy because the school was small. According to the participants, social hierarchy supported the formation of cliques and the culture of bullying. However, they felt that the attitudes of staff, parents and peers did not contribute to the culture of anti-bullying and this was an area where intervention was required.

5.3 INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION

Answers to the *how, what, where* and *when* questions provide that which informs the recommendations for intervention and prevention. Olweus (1994) very clearly states that schools will only see large reductions in bullying when intervention is in place at three levels, namely**: individual, class** and **whole school** levels. The intervention model, as suggested by Olweus, calls for the unequivocal involvement of *adults* (Olweus, 1993). Galen and Underwood emphasise the importance of "*consciousness raising* within school communities about the damaging effects of indirect aggression on girls" (1997:598).

5.3.1 Individual, class and whole school

In terms of this study, the different role players should be dealt with as *individuals.* However, one needs to take it one step further to determine what type of victim or bully one is dealing with, as this aids intervention. If the victim is submissive, one would work on "self esteem, assertiveness and confidence". With a provocative

victim, the emphasis would be on social skills training, reduction of aggressive behaviour and the use of assertive problem-solving strategies. Intervention with passive bullying would include building self confidence, forming healthy peer relationships and learning to say no when placed in uncomfortable situations. With a bully who is actively aggressive, intervention "tends to combine implementation of firm rules/expectations and consequences with praise from authority figures for appropriate interaction" (Carney & Merrell, 2001:374). Intervention should also be directed at bystanders in order to harness their power to make a positive difference. In this way the *class* and the *whole school* is being addressed. The whole school would also be addressed if anti-bullying was part of school policy. One type of programme, which is based on the tenets outlined in Olweus' approach, is called "The Whole School Response Program" (Carney & Merrell, 2001:374). It focuses intervention at three levels: crisis management, intervention strategies and preventative responses. This type of intervention aims at creating a school culture in which bullying is unacceptable. As mentioned in Chapter 4, creating a positive school culture would be one way of reducing bullying at schools. Intervention and prevention strategies should work towards changing the school culture and climate positively.

Consciousness raising should enable one to remove the aspect of unintentional bullying. The assumption is that girls who are aware of what kind of behaviour is regarded as bullying behaviour will be unable to hurt unintentionally. Consciousness raising would not only be aimed at the learners, but at the staff and parents as well. This study showed that adult intervention was most desired, yet appears unattainable at this point. The assumption behind increasing the awareness of adults in this context is that the greater their awareness, the more empathic they will be towards girls who are enduring bullying. Consciousness raising could include becoming informed about the different types of bullying and the consequences of bullying. Craig, Henderson and Murphy (2000:16) stated that "[t]eacher training programmes need to educate [student teachers] about the diversity of behaviours that constitute bullying and the long-term effects of experiencing these behaviours in order to increase teacher awareness and perceived seriousness of the problems". This training, which could be extended to parents, could include problem solving skills so that teachers and parents are good role models for pupils. Parents and

teachers can also be made aware of the four parenting styles in order that they may realise which style is more supportive of their children's emotional and psychological health.

Lastly, keeping a log of bullying incidents is recommended by Brewster and Railsback (2001). This would help with the identification of patterns of bullying and evaluate the intervention strategies that were used in the past. This approach could result in the resurrection and adaptation of the incident report introduced to the participants in the study, which was discussed in Chapter 3. Below is a suggested incident report with possible adaptations (Fig. 5.2):

BULLYING INCIDENT REPORT

Date:...

What happened?

_____

_____

_____

Where did it happen?

_____

When did it happen?

_____

Who was involved?

_____

For office use only:
Date of intervention:
Who handled the intervention?
What intervention was suggested?
What were the results of the intervention?

Figure 5.2:
Suggested incident report for identification of bullying patterns

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As this study has used the ecosystemic approach as the metatheory which guide the investigation, the most obvious limitation is the fact that research was focused on the opinions of Grade 5 girls without also interviewing their teachers and parents. However, due to the nature of a master's thesis, the scope of this study had to be focussed and therefore limited. Follow-up research including teachers and parents as participants would provide a more global image of the culture of bullying at this particular school. One could then also obtain an idea of intervention by staff and parents from their perspective. It may also have been useful to observe girls on the playground as the "Where?" question mentioned in Chapter 2 was not fully explored (Section 2.3). This research could be used for different types of analyses, e.g. discourse analysis, narrative analysis etc.

5.5 REFLECTIONS OF THE RESEARCHER

Using children as participants can be extremely worrying as far as ethics are concerned. I had to remain consciously aware of the ethics of the approach because of the difference in perceived power between me and the participants. In a school setting, children are liable to be compliant and I had to guard against this – that their rights as individuals were respected and that they were aware that they could not be forced into anything with regard to this research project.

Something else I realised while doing the research was the importance of using different methods to allow everyone's voice to be heard as children learn and express themselves in different ways. The following is what I wrote in my research diary when this realisation dawned on me:

I'm beginning to realize how important it is to use different stimuli because the group that seemed to be repeating themselves were so much more expressive when they used the poems and picture collages. I'll see how everyone handles the music and photographs.

When considering the effectiveness of the different methods it is difficult to say which method was most effective as they each had positive properties and spoke to the different preferences of the participants.

I also came to the realization that the girls with whom I was working were more than willing to share themselves with me, exposing their fears and risking vulnerability. It was therefore important for me to act as protector as well as researcher and to show them my appreciation for all they had shared. The following extract from my research diary expresses this thought:

I was thinking that I would like to thank the girls in some way…a personal letter to each child that has some uplifting message when I leave.
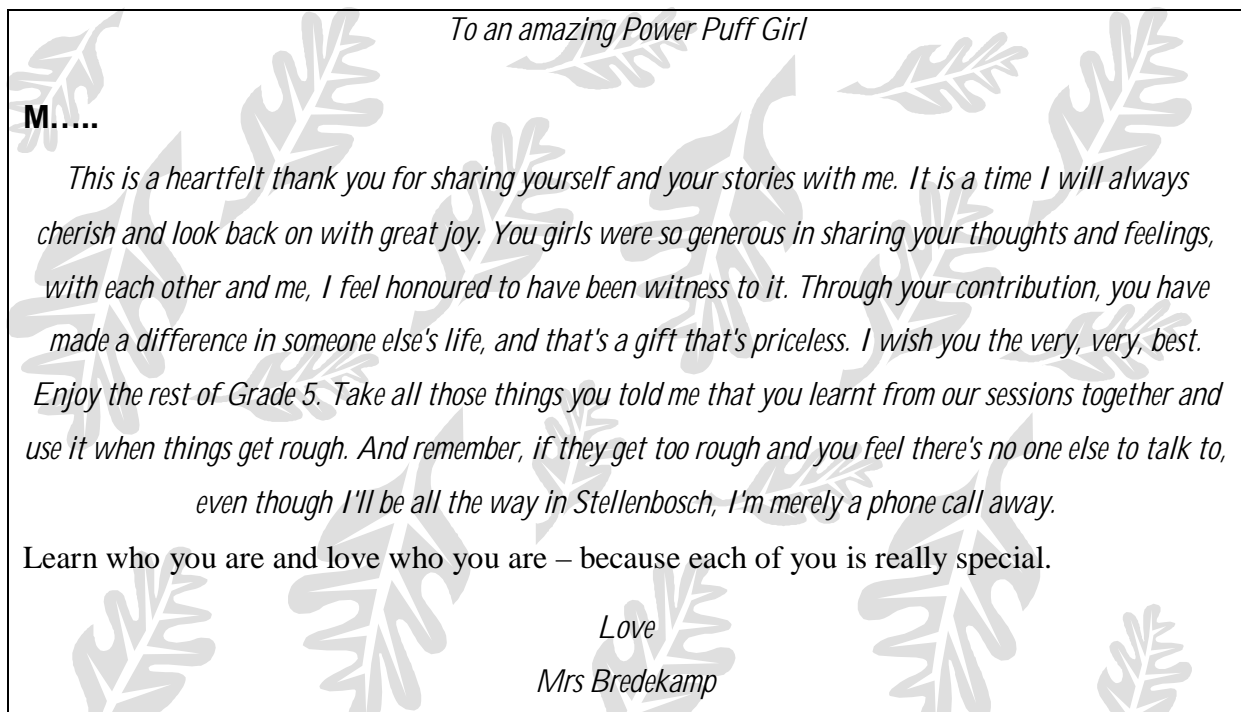
The result of this reflection was the following (Fig.5.3):

To an amazing Power Puff Girl

M…..

This is a heartfelt thank you for sharing yourself and your stories with me. It is a time I will always cherish and look back on with great joy. You girls were so generous in sharing your thoughts and feelings, with each other and me, I feel honoured to have been witness to it. Through your contribution, you have made a difference in someone else's life, and that's a gift that's priceless. I wish you the very, very, best. Enjoy the rest of Grade 5. Take all those things you told me that you learnt from our sessions together and use it when things get rough. And remember, if they get too rough and you feel there's no one else to talk to, even though I'll be all the way in Stellenbosch, I'm merely a phone call away.

Learn who you are and love who you are – because each of you is really special.

Love

Mrs Bredekamp

Figure 5.3:
Letter of thanks

5.6 CONCLUSION

This study reflects findings which mostly concur with international literature. It has contributed to the meagre knowledge base with regard to bullying amongst girls and, more specifically, to bullying amongst girls in South Africa. The results of this study can contribute to the understanding of the problems faced by girls. It can be used to help families, teachers and psychologists in this field to better understand bullying of this nature and to help with the formulation of intervention and prevention strategies.

Most importantly, it can hopefully help the participants of this study, who so generously gave of their time and so readily shared their experiences, to feel more empowered to make a positive difference in their lives and in the lives of others. This hope of mine was voiced by one of the participants in the final interview:

> P: I think maybe a few people in this room might commit to try and not bully others because we've learnt all of this and we know how it feels because it's happened to us and I think most of us are going to commit to try and not bully others (T11P8L401-404).

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APPENDIX A

14 March 2006

Dear ………………………………

Requesting permission for study

I am a Master's student in Educational Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch as well as a mother at this school and I am busy with my thesis on bullying amongst girls. The aim of my study is to understand bullying from the perspective of girls currently in Grade 5. This will involve interviewing them during school time (liturgical singing on Fridays) and could also include them keeping a diary of events they may recall or events happening after they have been interviewed. This is planned to take place during the second term of this year. The school has kindly agreed to participate in my research and your permission is now also requested. The identities of all participants as well as the school will remain confidential in all discussions of findings. However, this confidentiality is limited in the sense that should I discover potentially risky behaviour, it is my obligation to report such behaviour to the head of the school who will in turn notify parents concerned. Debriefing the girls being interviewed as well as providing methods of empowerment will also be an important part of the process.

Informed written consent is requested from you, *Cathy's* parent/guardian. Please sign the consent form A beneath should you agree to your daughter's participation. However, *Cathy* will only participate in the study if she also provides assent after I have fully discussed the above-mentioned risks and benefits with her.

Opportunity may also arise where interviewing parents on this matter will be needed to support data received. Should you be willing to participate in individual or group interviews, please sign the consent form B and provide a telephone number. This interview will take place at a venue and time of your convenience and will also fall within the boundaries of confidentiality as set out above.

When one considers the short and long term effects of bullying, considering intervention becomes essential. Your daughter's participation and yours, will be invaluable in helping to alleviate this concern at our school.

Should you have any queries about my study, please feel free to contact me at the number provided.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely

………………………………………
Judith Bredekamp (Mrs)

CONSENT FORM A

I, ……………………….………… parent/guardian of ………………..……………..
hereby verify that I have read the letter above and having understood its contents give my
consent for my daughter to participate in the research as part of the master's thesis for
Judith Bredekamp.

...…..………………………………….....
Signature of parent/guardian

.……………………………………..
Date

……………………………………………………………………………………….………

CONSENT FORM B

I, ……………………….………… parent/guardian of ……………..…………………
hereby verify that I have read the letter above and having understood its contents agree to
participate in the research as part of the master's thesis for Judith Bredekamp.

...……………………………………......
Signature

.……………………………………..
Date

...……………………………………….
Telephone number

APPENDIX B

Dear …………………….….

Thank you so much for returning your form to school. As you probably know, your parents agreed to you participating in my study. However, I did tell you that your participation would only happen if you also agreed to it. Please tick one of the boxes below so that I know you would like to take part or that you would prefer not to do so. You can hand this letter back to your teacher as soon as you've ticked a box. If at any time you change your mind about participation you will be free to withdraw without any consequences.

Thank you once again for your time.

Kind regards,
Mrs Bredekamp

Kindly tick the box of your choice

……………………….……………………….. (name)Gr 5….

☐

    I would like to participate in this study and I know I can withdraw at any time

☐

    I would prefer not to take part in this study

APPENDIX C

Bullying techniques

    1. Let's list some of the things happening to Sally.

Perception

    2. Can you help me understand why Sally's friends are treating her differently?

    3. Why is Cathy treating Sally differently?

Intervention

    4. What would you do if you were in Sally's situation?

Definition

    5. What words can you use to describe bullying?

Probes:

Can you explain further?

Would you like to put it differently?

APPENDIX D

"The song - Ugly - by the Sugababes"

Record label: Universal-Island Records Ltd.

APPENDIX E

A sample of the photographs taken

The Gate

The stairs leading to classrooms

The storeroom in a classroom

The playground