THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIRECT AND INDIRECT AGGRESSION AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE AMONG THREE CULTURAL GROUPS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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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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Date

ABSTRACT

The aim of this exploratory study was to investigate the causal relationship between levels of direct and indirect aggression and the presence of social competence (specifically the ability to initiate relationships, portray negative assertion, disclose personal information, provide emotional support and advice, and to manage social conflict) among different cultural groups in South Africa. Two questionnaires, the RCRQ (Richardson Conflict Response Questionnaire) the ICQ (Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire) measuring respectively aggression and social competence were administered to 729 black, coloured and white pregraduate university students from the University of the Western Cape and the University of Stellenbosch.

The results showed poor but significant relationships between aggression and social competence. Strong significant cultural, gender and interaction effects were found. It was found that direct aggression is positively associated with the ability to initiate relationships as well as negative assertion, but there was a negative correlation with empathy. Indirect aggression was found to be negatively correlated with negative assertion. However, less significant results were found between cultural groups that do not fully reflect the results obtained for the total group. Significant gender differences for direct aggression were reported by the coloured and white groups with females engaging in less direct aggression than males. For indirect aggression it was reported that coloured

females display significantly less aggression than males. The only significant cross-cultural difference in aggression for males was found for direct aggression where coloured males reported higher levels than the other groups. White females displayed significantly less direct aggression whilst coloured females reported significantly lower levels of indirect aggression than the other groups. Regarding social competence, significant gender differences were found in the black group for negative assertion and interpersonal conflict and within all three groups for empathy. Finally, significant cross-cultural differences were reported in four of the five domains of social competence.

Enough evidence was found for high social competence to be associated with relatively low levels of aggression. These findings can make a significant contribution towards further research in this field and the subsequent development and implementation of more social skills programmes aimed at children. Such social competence training programmes may equip the next generation with sufficient skills to handle conflict and aggression in an acceptable manner and may subsequently reduce violence in our society.
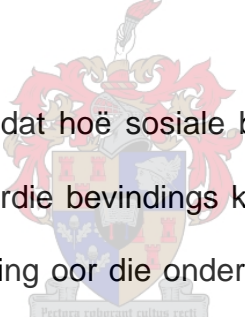
OPSOMMING

Die doelstelling van hierdie navorsingstudie was om 'n oorsaaklike verband te vind tussen die vlakke van direkte en indirekte aggressie en die teenwoordigheid van sosiale bekwaamheid (met spesifieke verwysing na die vermoë om verhoudings aan te knoop, assertiwiteit, mededeelsaamheid van persoonlike inligting, empatie en konflikhantering) by verskillende kultuurgroepe in Suid-Afrika.

Twee vraelyste, die RCRQ (Richardson Conflict Response Questionnaire) en die ICQ (Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire) wat onderskeidelik aggressie en sosiale bekwaamheid meet, is deur 729 voorgraadse swart, bruin en wit universiteitstudente van die Universiteit van die Weskaap en die Universiteit van Stellenbosch voltooi.
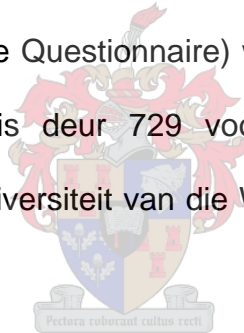
Die resultate het 'n swak maar beduidende verband tussen aggressie en sosiale bekwaamheid getoon. Sterk, beduidende resultate is vir kultuur- en geslagsverskille en die interaksie tussen kultuur en geslag gevind. Direkte aggressie het verband gehou met die vermoë om verhoudings te inisieer en assertiwiteit, maar negatief gekorreleer met empatie. Indirekte aggressie ge negatief gekorreleer met assertiwiteit. Daar is minder beduidende resultate tussen kulturele groepe gevind wat nie die resultate van die totale groep weerspieël nie. Beduidende geslagsverskille is gevind vir direkte aggressie waar bruin en wit vrouens minder direkte aggressie toon as mans. In die geval van

indirekte aggressie het bruin vrouens beduidend minder aggressie as mans gerapporteer. Die enigste beduidende kruiskulturele verskil vir mans was gevind vir direkte aggressie waar gekleurde mans hoër vlakke openbaar as mans in ander groepe. In die geval van vrouens het wit vrouens beduidend minder direkte aggressie gerapporteer terwyl bruin vrouens weer beduidend meer direkte aggressie openbaar as vrouens in die ander groepe. Beduidende geslagsverskille is gevind in die swart groep vir assertiwiteit en interpersoonlike konflikhantering en in al drie groepe vir empatie. Laastens is beduidende kruiskulturele verskille gerapporteer in vier van die vyf areas van sosiale bekwaamheid.

Genoegsame bewys is gevind dat hoë sosiale bekwaamheid verband hou met laer vlakke van aggressie. Hierdie bevindings kan 'n beduidende bydrae lewer ten opsigte van verdere navorsing oor die onderwerp asook die ontwikkeling en implementering van meer sosiale vaardigheidsprogramme vir kinders. Toepaslike sosiale vaardigheidsprogramme kan die volgende geslag toerus met die nodige vaardighede om konflik en aggressie op aanvaarbare maniere te hanteer en kan gevolglik tot verminderde geweld in ons gemeenskap lei.

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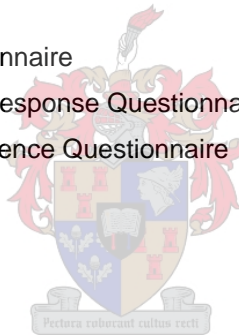
In particular, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of my supervisor. Ms WH Theron, in addition to giving advice and encouragement, applied her experience and insights to make many constructive suggestions throughout the course of this study. She was of tremendous help and provided me with extraordinary guidance.

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1   INTRODUCTION

Aggression and violence are of the most pressing social problems faced by the modern world (World Health Organisation, 2002). It has become an embedded part of our society, causing tremendous human cost in grief and pain, even though a large degree of it is invisible. Storr (1968) recognises that aggression is intrinsically part of human nature and that it is obvious that man could never have attained his present dominance, nor even have survived as a species, unless he possessed a large endowment of aggression. It is a tragic paradox that the very qualities which have led to man's extraordinary success are also most likely to destroy him.
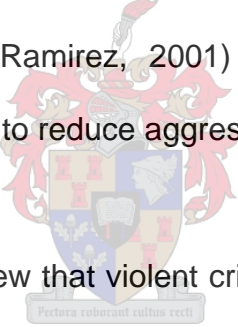
Aggression and violence are integrally part of the history of South Africa and there is little doubt that the country has a history and an existing culture of violence. According to Angless and Shefer (1997) violence has become an acceptable and effective way to gain control in different areas of our lives. Politically inspired violence in South Africa served as an effective weapon in the struggle against Apartheid but has bred a legacy that endures to the present day (Kynoch, 1999; Mtintso, 2001; Stevens & Wynchank, 2000; Wyngaard, & Van Niekerk, 2001; Stevens, Seedat, & Van Niekerk, 2003) and has now become a reality of life for many South Africans especially those in disadvantaged communities. Hamber (1999) argues that the nature of violence in this country in the early nineties has changed from vertical (i.e. the state against its citizens and the citizens against the state) to horizontal (i.e. fellow citizens against one another) so that political violence is overshadowed

by violent crime. Sullivan (2005) elaborates on Hamber's argument and explains that political violence arose out of the imbalance of power whilst criminal violence progressed from the disparity of resources. Oppression was not only expressed through violence and the gross denial of rights, but also through an uneven distribution of resources. The end of Apartheid introduced equal rights and the promotion of social justice, but the continued inequity in the distribution of resources continues to be a factor causing crime and violence. Road rage, the raping of children and babies, violence against women and brutal and senseless assaults and murders form the daily headlines of local newspapers. Hammond (1999) looks briefly at the origins of violence in the South African context when he writes that:

Social inequality and enormous deprivation caused by the Apartheid system are at the root of most violence in South Africa. But violent crime in South African society as a phenomenon has other multiple causal factors that extend beyond deprivation. Some of these include, to mention a few, a patriarchal society where women and children are devalued and vulnerable; the historical development of a culture of violence where violence was seen by all significant political parties as a legitimate means to achieve their goals; the deregulation of state control during the negotiations period; an ineffective criminal justice system and the perception that there will be no serious consequences for criminal activity; and the opening of South African borders to criminal syndicates and operations since the shift to democracy has also had some impact on rising levels of crime (p. 6).

In 1999 Kynoch observed that despite the unprecedented level of public concern with high levels of violence in the post-Apartheid era, remarkably little had been done to explore and understand the roots of this problem. Many governmental and non-governmental organisations like the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) and the Human Science Research Council in South Africa are presently actively involved in various research initiatives regarding violence in the country. Although very little cross-cultural research had been done in South Africa in the past due to the political history of the country, South Africa is now actively involved in international projects conducting research which is focussed on cross-cultural and gender differences in various aspects of aggression among adolescents (Theron, Matthee, Steel, & Ramirez, 2001) in order to understand this phenomenon and to find ways to reduce aggression.

Crime statistics support the view that violent crime is not uniformly distributed throughout the country and it indicates that the Western Cape is one of the most violent regions in South Africa. The South African Police Service reports a homicide rate of 40 persons per 100 000 for the country, but a rate of 58 persons per 100 000 in the Western Cape which is regionally the highest incident rate (South African Police Service, 2005a). Similarly, the statistics for assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm occurs at a rate of 535 persons per 100 000 for the whole country with the rate being 741 per 100 000 persons in the Western Cape which is the second highest regional rate (South African Police Service, 2005b). For common assault the national figure is 575 per 100 000 and for the Western Cape it is 1066 per 100 000,

which is again the highest regional rate (South African Police Service, 2005c). It is therefore obvious that crime and violence have become a serious crisis for South Africans who live with the devastating consequences of this problem.

The application of research on human aggression to public policy on violence could have significant benefits in future. Janse van Rensburg (1998) identifies the role of aggression in people's behaviour and the indication of interpersonal or social skills which would enable them to handle problems regarding aggression more effectively, as an aspect that requires further research. Social skills are an integral part of human functioning, especially regarding interpersonal relationships. These skills are taught and practiced from a very early stage in a person's life. As people get older, they become more skilled regarding social skills and these skills become intertwined with their roles in life, such as their occupational and marital relationships, their friendships and their daily interaction with other people. The effect of insufficient or inappropriate skills or the lack of social skills is evident on several levels of an individual's functioning and it often results in antisocial behaviour like aggression (Janse van Rensburg, 1998). Sufficient proof exists already that socially competent people find alternative and acceptable ways to solve conflict situations and that especially conflict management skills and empathy reduces aggression (Burleson, 2003; Fry, 1998; Letendre, Henry & Tolan, 2003; Rens, 1991; Richardson & Green, 2003; Roper, 2002). Social competence could therefore be a pivotal factor in reducing aggression. It is thus essential to conduct more research to investigate the relationship

between aggression and social competence. A positive outcome of research in this regard could be applied in effective and practical ways such as more appropriate social skills training programmes for children to equip them with the necessary skills to manage conflict situations in peaceful ways.

Because aggressive behaviour is such a severe and critical problem in South Africa, more attention will be given to aggression than social competence in some of the discussions of the present study. Social competence will be discussed with a specific aim to understand how it can mitigate aggressive behaviour.

The aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship between the levels of direct and indirect aggression in individuals and the development of social competence (specifically the ability to initiate relationships, portray negative assertion, disclose personal information, provide emotional support and advice, and to manage social conflict).

2   CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

This section aims to provide contextual insight in and as far as possible clear definitions of the concepts that form the basis of the present study.
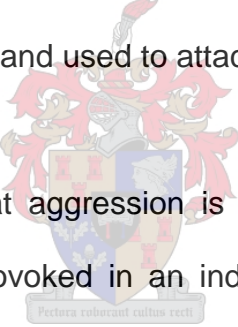
2.1   Aggression and Violence

There are various definitions that attempt to capture the construct of human aggression. Burbank (1994) warns against a simplistic view of aggression, as it may, like many other human actions, be multi-determined, motivated by a variety of perceptions, emotions and needs. She also points out that the victims, aggressors, and observers may all perceive an aggressive act in different ways. Baron and Richardson (1994) developed a working definition for aggression, namely "Aggression is any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment" (p.5).
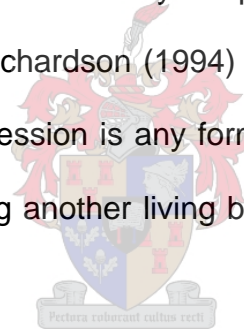
Geen (2001) offers a more comprehensive definition when he says that "aggression is the delivery of an aversive stimulus from one person to another, with intent to harm and with an expectation of causing such harm, when the other person is motivated to escape or avoid the stimulus" (p.4). However, he admits that it does not cover all examples of aggression. For example, it does not take into account that emotions play a role in many acts of aggression, nor does it account for cognitive processes preceding aggression or the fact that aggression is often reciprocal.
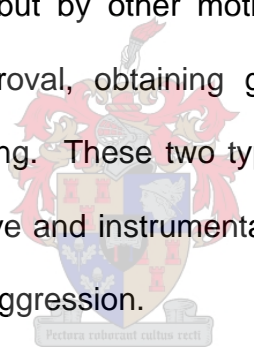
Although most people consider aggression to be a physical or verbal attack (Walker & Richardson, cited in Richardson, Spina, Green, & Oksengorn, 1998), there are many less obvious ways in which people retaliate and hurt each other. Many of the definitions for aggression aim at distinguishing between different types of aggression. Buss and Perry (1992) identify four dimensions of aggression, namely physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility where physical and verbal aggression are aimed at harming or injuring others. Anger is the affective component of aggression that serves to arouse and prepare the perpetrator for aggression, while hostility is the cognitive component expressed through feelings of ill will and injustice. Smith and Theron (2003) define hostile aggression as a type of aggression triggered by anger and used to attack, damage or avenge.

Geen (2001) also argues that aggression is often accompanied by strong emotions. Anger is often provoked in an individual and this emotion then guides affective aggressive behaviour aimed solely at injuring or harming the provoking person. Aggression is also associated with bodily arousal and a flash of anger can inspire retaliatory aggression. Fridja (in Geen, 2001), however, points out that retaliation sometimes happens so long after provocation that it is difficult to link the aggression to anger which is mostly a short-lived emotion. This "delayed response" affective aggression is spurred by a more complex cognitive state, as opposed to an emotion, which can be labelled a "sentiment" that, in time transforms into hatred. Geen (2001) also refers to instrumental aggression to describe aggressive acts that do not have a strong emotional basis but rather serve a purpose or are a means to an end.

Examples of instrumental aggression include self-defense, aggressive military actions and efforts to establish coercive power over others through violence. He concludes by noting that affective and instrumental aggression is not mutually exclusive and that some acts of aggressive have both affective and instrumental properties.

Crick and Dodge (1996) discuss reactive and proactive aggression where the first term refers to aggressive acts performed in response to provocation (a direct attack or an insult) and include both self-defense and angry actions. Proactive aggression is more complex and is not evoked by anger, the need for self-defense or hostility, but by other motives that relate to gaining or asserting power, social approval, obtaining goods. A good example of proactive aggression is bullying. These two types of aggression are closely related to respectively affective and instrumental aggression and to a certain degree to direct and indirect aggression.

Buss (1961) was the first to introduce a dichotomy in aggression. This concept has been developed through the years. Some of these views that aggressive behaviour can be classified in two distinct types of aggression are discussed below. This gives more insight into the complexity of aggression as a whole and it also serves to give a better understanding of direct and indirect aggression which formed the focus of this study.

Björkqvist, Österman and Kaukiainen (1992) define *direct aggression* as the delivery of an aversive stimulus to another person in a face-to-face

confrontation. Direct aggression is that which has as a target the instigator of anger or the person who provoked the aggressive behaviour (this includes verbal face-to-face confrontation, institutional, assault or physical behaviour etc.). It is commonly accepted that direct aggression takes place through direct social interaction. Ramirez and Andreu (2003) describe the subtypes of aggression that can be considered as direct aggression, namely physical aggression (involving direct body or instrumental contact between the aggressor and his/her opponent), verbal aggression which involves language (in the case of direct aggression this might include sarcasm, screaming, abusive language, and mockery) and gestures or postural aggression (expressed through facial expressions, gestures, staring, rolling eyes, and tossing hair). Direct aggression can also be used to threaten the victim. Personal attributes as well as situational or contextual factors have been found to mediate direct aggression. It is possible that individuals, who are high on attributes of trait anger, aggression, and irritability, may experience difficulty refraining from responding to provocation with aggression. The individual who typically uses direct aggression could be characterised in general as an extrovert who confronts people and situations, who is not inhibited in social interaction and who is likely to experience and express anger (Richardson & Green, 2003). Gender also seems to play a role in direct aggression as it often involves primarily male-male interaction (Richardson & Green, 1999). Alcohol intoxication is also a strong predictor of direct aggression (Zeichner, Frey, & Parrott, 2003). When terms such as "direct aggression" or "violence" are used by lay persons, they are perceived as being negative and undesirable for example by the media and in religion

(Ramirez, 1993). Mild acts of direct aggression, for example verbal aggression where the aggressor shouts or screams at the victim, were found to be more justifiable than stronger ones, such as physical aggression where the perpetrator physically attacks the victim resulting in severe injuries (Fujihara, Kohyama, Andreu, & Ramirez, 1996, Ramirez, 1993). It has also been noted that individuals do not generally attack the people they work and live with (Richardson & Hammock, 2003), but that they often tend to be more subtle in their aggression towards others, which introduces indirect aggression.

Indirect aggression is defined as harm delivered circuitously, often with the aggressor remaining anonymous and escaping counterattack of social disapproval of such actions (Lagerspetz & Björkqvist, 1994; Björkqvist et al., 1992b; Lagerspetz, Björkqvist & Peltonen, 1988). Indirect aggression thus has a substitute target (not the instigator or provoker) or no concrete target at all (Frodi, Macaulay, & Thome, 1977). This type of aggression may include rejection, alienation of affection, scheming, spreading nasty rumours, some forms of social manipulation of the other person's relationships (for example denial of social reinforcement) or secretly destroying something of value to the other person. Indirect aggression thus involves in many cases an attempt to harm the target's peer relationships and feelings of social inclusion in some way. The object is to find the best and most effective retaliation strategy possible, while at the same time exposing the individual to as little danger as possible. Therefore, indirect aggression is a "safe" form of aggression that maximises the effect, but minimises the risk of physical danger. Björkqvist,

Österman and Lagerspetz (1994) have also found that indirect aggression can be divided into social manipulation in the traditional sense and rational aggression which is aggression disguised by sophisticated rational arguments, appearing and presented in rational form as "no aggression at all" but experienced by the victim as injurious and unjust behaviour. Engagement in indirect aggression is associated with a pattern of behaviour and characteristics that suggests a generally less confrontational and more inhibited approach to social environments. Richardson and Green (2003) report that although indirect aggression is associated with experiencing anger, it is also associated with some level of anxiety or distress in social settings. The individual who typically resorts to indirect aggression could be characterised as one who is unwilling or unable to engage the social world, has an inability to refuse requests and control attention, and experiences nervousness in general and distress in emergency situations.
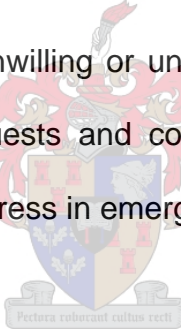
Richardson and Green (2003) point out that several studies have found indirect and direct aggression are only moderately correlated, which suggests that direct and indirect aggression may thus indeed be two distinct forms of aggression. They have found that individuals who report to engage frequently in direct aggression also report being comfortable confronting people, not displaying shyness in social interaction and being willing and able to express their anger. However, individuals who report engaging in indirect aggression scored high on traits associated with a less assertive and shyer approach to social situations.

Violence is often used synonymously with aggression as these two concepts are very closely associated. The World Health Organisation (2002) defines violence as

> The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (p 5).

2.2 Social Competence

Another focus of the present study was social competence. Most people have no difficulty in thinking of a socially competent person as someone who seems to prosper in social situations. This type of person is well-liked by many, never seems uncomfortable and seems to be alert to even subtle conversational cues. Despite this subjective understanding of a socially competent person, research has often failed to demonstrate the validity of the social competence construct (Sternberg & Smith, 1985). The concept of social competence has evolved through the years until today where it has an implication synonymous to the meaning expressed by the term social skills. Ford (1982) defines social competence as "the attainment of relevant social goals in specific social contexts, using appropriate means and resulting in positive developmental outcomes" (p.324). It is also described as the ability to function successfully within a group (McCormick, 1999). Thorndike (1920) introduced the term social intelligence as the ability to accomplish interpersonal tasks. Keating (1978) uses the terms social competence and social intelligence as synonyms. Björkqvist, Österman and Kaukiainen's (2000) description of social skills seems to be representative of the general

consensus and understanding of what social skills entails. They have identified three distinctive components of social skills: perceptual, cognitive-analytical and behavioural (skills related). They explain it as follows in the context of conflict handling where social intelligence is synonymous for social competence:

> Cleverness in analyzing the social behaviour of others is central and, reciprocally, so is the ability to recognize motives and cognitive traps of one's own. Furthermore, the socially intelligent individual is capable of producing adequate behaviour for the purpose of achieving desired social goals. As far as goals with respect to conflicts are concerned, these may be hostile, but also aiming at a peaceful resolution of conflicts. Social intelligence should be an asset in conflict situations, whether the individual chooses to be aggressive or peaceful. The choice between these two types of conflict behaviour is, for the socially intelligent individual, optional (p.192).
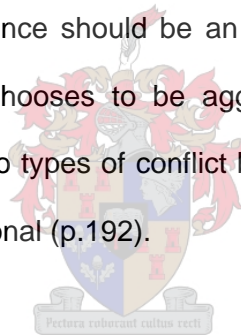
Silvera, Martinussen and Dahl (in press) define social intelligence as "the ability to understand other people and how they will react to different social situations" (p.7). Their research identified a three factor structure underlying the concept of social intelligence or social competence, namely 1) social information processing, 2) social skills, and 3) social awareness. Ford (1982) describes the socially competent adolescent as empathetic, able to think of ways to address interpersonal problem situations and to construct coherent plans or strategies for resolving them. These individuals are more goal-directed, and possess the intrapersonal resources to achieve these goals. Ford and Tisak (1983) give a comprehensive description of the characteristics

of social competence and identify three criteria often used in definitions for the concept. This first criterion refers to the decoding of social information which includes skills such as the ability to read nonverbal cues or make accurate social inferences. Role taking, person perception, social insight, and interpersonal awareness are illustrative constructs. The second criterion is the effectiveness or flexibility of an individual's social performance and concerns behavioural outcomes. The last criterion is very broad and includes any social measure with a skill component. In the present study, however, the focus on and approach towards social competence will be based on the work of Buhrmester, Furman, Reis and Wittenberg (1988) who have identified five domains that encapsulate social competence. These domains are (a) initiating relationships, (b) negative assertion, (c) disclosing personal information, (d) providing emotional support and advice, and (e) managing social conflict. These social competence domains are fairly broad and comprehensive, although they do not exhaustively cover all important spheres of social competence. Initiating interactions and relationships relates strongly to social expressivity and control – these skills involve speaking out and readily adopting different roles (especially regarding leadership) to meet the demands of the situation. It is linked to the second domain, negative assertion, which involves claiming personal rights and expressing displeasure with others. The third domain, disclosing personal information to others is an important communication skill. The fourth skill, providing emotional support refers to providing comfort to others when they are experiencing problems or distress and is strongly associated with empathy. In the present study the term empathy will often be used to refer to the concept of providing emotional

support to others.   Finally, managing interpersonal conflicts requires strong emotional sensitivity and conflict handling skills (in Buhrmester et al., 1988). All these social competencies involve responsiveness to social interaction.
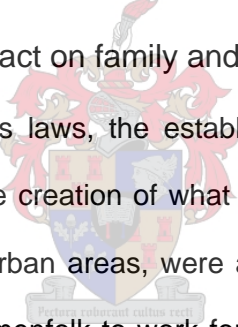
2.3   Black, Coloured and White Cultures

Hofstede (cited in Smith & Bond, 1993) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another" (p.1). Keesing (cited in Nhlapo, 1992) underscores an important use of culture, i.e. as a device which enables us to give meaning to the world and to make statements to each other about ourselves and our universe when he refers to culture as a system of shared ideas and meanings that underlie the ways in which people live. De la Rey (1992) concludes that culture plays a large part in what we become and it gives us continuity with our past. However, culture also conforms individual behaviour to predominant values and norms and inhibits and controls individuals in this way. Nhlapo (1992) states that culture provides us, above all else, with a sense of identity to a group, i.e. social identity.

South Africa is home to a diverse multitude of people with unique cultures, traditions and languages. This study involves black people whose home language is Xhosa, coloured people and white people (both the latter groups' home languages are either English or Afrikaans). The terms black, coloured and white people are used throughout this document to distinguish between different cultural groups and not in support of the racial classification of the Apartheid system. It is important to note that the following discussion of the

distinctive cultural characteristics of these groups focuses on aspects of importance to the current research.

The political history of South Africa and specifically the system of Apartheid led to severe hostility between the white group (oppressor) and the coloured and black groups (oppressed) who entered into violence (The Struggle) to end Apartheid. The problems introduced by Apartheid and the impact it had on black and coloured people in South Africa have been severe. Ramphele (1986) explains how Apartheid and migrant labour disrupted the family life of black South Africans and left women to raise their children alone. This is supported by Sachs (1990) who briefly describes the legacy Apartheid has left behind with a focus on the impact on family and social life of black people:

> The tax system, the pass laws, the establishment of compounds for mine and farm labour, the creation of what were called black locations on the periphery of the urban areas, were all designed to split African families and compel the menfolk to work for the whites on the basis of single-person wages, while the womenfolk produced new generations of labourers in the so-called reserves. The mines and large parts of farming and industry became dependent on migrant labour; the political system of Apartheid was little more than the superstructure of migrant labour. Family life for Africans was to be made impossible in the reserves and illegal in the towns.
>
> One direct outcome of the migrant labour system was the denial for decades that Africans living in towns had the right to decent housing. Thus today we have homelessness on an enormous scale. The lack of housing is doubly injurious – it prevents any possibilities of stable and

decent family life, and it is a massive reminder of social inequality (pp. 42-43).

It could be argued that the racial classification and legislation have emphasised and created a greater awareness of culture and group identity. Within groups it led to certain attitudes and behaviours but also to depersonalisation and stereotyping of members of outgroups. This means that it may have made it easier in the past for all three cultural groups in the present study to dehumanise members of outgroups and to commit acts of aggression against them.

Because the majority of the black participants in the study were Xhosas, the focus of this discussion will be on the Xhosa culture which is rich in traditions and customs. They hold strong beliefs in magic and witchcraft (Möller, 2001). Roche (2003) gives a good overview of the most important traditions of which perhaps the most characteristic is that of the "abakhwetha" – a prominent male initiation ceremony where males aged between 15 and 25 transform into adults and undergo circumcision as part of this process, even though most of them are still in the adolescent development phase. It is questionable whether they are ready to cope with the demands of an adult world. Adolescence as a development phase poses its own challenges to the youth where they have to manage the task to develop "identity versus identity confusion". These developmental challenges in combination with other environmental factors make this a period of tension and frustration (Olivier, 2003). This tension and frustration may be expressed in aggressive

behaviour and it could be argued these adolescents may not have developed sufficient and effective interpersonal conflict management skills, for example, to deal with conflict in an adult world. They can also now enter into marriage and when they do, they will have to pay lobola - the exchange of cattle and often cash from the bridegroom and his family to the bride's family.   Sachs (1990) feels that the original purpose of lobola, namely to bring the two families together, has faded and that in contemporary conditions, instead, it commercialises marriage. The author concludes that if this is true, it must impact on women's positions in a family, as it can ultimately mean that they are objects being bought by men which highlights a strong patriarchal nature.

Corder (2001) highlights another very important part of the Xhosa culture and social life. Ubuntu is expressed by the Xhosa saying *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which means "a person is a person through other persons". It is a figure of speech that describes the importance of group solidarity on issues that were pivotal to the survival of the African communities, who as a consequence of poverty and deprivation have to survive through group care and not only individual reliance (Liwane, 2003). As such, ubuntu conflicts with individualism and capitalism, which are key characteristics of the Western society, as it is not selfish and self-centred and the rights of the individual is secondary to the well-being of the group. Sarkisian and Gerstel (2004) have reported that black people tend to be very practical in their provision of support and that they focus strongly on problem-solving when faced with another person's problems. If they were to focus on an individual's emotional state of mind and needs it will be inappropriate as it may disrupt the harmony

of the group. It could therefore be expected that Blacks will be less competent where it concerns the social skill of providing emotional support. Nussbaum's (2003) description of ubuntu highlights a social skill relevant to this study, namely the initiation of interpersonal relationships:

> Ubuntu is a social philosophy, a way of being, a code of ethics and behavior deeply embedded in African culture. The underlying value seeks to honor the dignity of each person and is concerned about the development and maintenance of mutually affirming and enhancing relationships. Because ubuntu embraces and requires justice, it inspires and therefore creates a firm foundation for our common humanity (p.2).

Peltzer (1995) introduces the term "transitional person" to describe a black person who is in the process of crossing from traditional to western culture. He argues that the person can temporarily revert back to traditional culture especially during crisis periods. This is supported by Hemson (2002) when he argues that under the conditions of modernisation and globalisation, it is often assumed that traditional society is gradually losing its power, but that these processes (associated as they are by a history of dispossession and racism) are uneven and contradictory. A transitional person's mind is western-oriented but still psychologically rooted in traditional culture. Peltzer also states that a traditional person's social status is very dependent upon the group and its values, norms and ideals while the transitional person is more removed from the group in that sense and has undergone a process of individuation with a stronger focus on achievement and competition. Whereas the traditional person's process of socialisation depends on people and the group norms, the western person is socialised more by objects from the

environment.   Through exposure to people in this process, the traditional person will probably develop more social intelligence than technological intelligence (as in the case of westerners).   The black participants in the present study can most probably be described as transitional persons with the associated norms.

Motsemme (2003) makes the point that black identity in South Africa faces serious challenges post-1994 especially as more affluent Blacks move from the townships into the previously "white-only" suburbs.   According to Motsemme this leads to a differentiation between the "authentic Blacks" and "fake Blacks" who are seen to be striving for "whiteness".   This may create a problem for the present research when one attempts to generalise or extrapolate findings to the whole group.

These identity problems are probably also experienced by the coloured people to a certain degree.   In fact, it seems as if they experience identity problems at more than one level, because although the coloured people of South Africa were considered a separate group under the racial classification set out by Apartheid legislation, which distinguished between Whites, Coloureds, Indians and Blacks, they do not have a homogenous racial identity.   Instead, they are historically made up of a heterogeneous group of people of different origins and diverse life experiences whose common denominator was the fact that they were of mixed parentage (Martin, 1998, Du Pré, 1997). These included slaves from the East, descendants of European settlers and Khoi-San women and other individuals who could be classified as

neither white nor indigenous black people. According to Du Pré (1997) they are, culturally speaking, much closer to white South Africans, especially Afrikaans speaking Whites than they are with black South Africans, despite being discriminated upon under the Apartheid legislation. They share a language and religious beliefs with white people (although a small group of coloured people, known as the Cape Malays are Muslim). Martin also points out that, during the 1994 elections, the majority of the coloured people voted for the National Party (the former oppressor) and that they consider their current position in South Africa as non-influential. They seem to be caught somewhere in the middle between the ruling group (black people) and the former rulers (white people). Steenkamp (2004) states that the coloured community feels a strong sense of alienation from the government. They feel that they are losing out on the benefits of affirmative action and state development programs (which they feel benefit mostly the black communities). Coloured people also experience an unconcern from government as to the plight of their community and an inadequate and ineffective police force which cannot deal with the crime and violence in the disadvantaged coloured communities.

Jensen (2004) paints a fairly dark picture of the violence and poverty faced by many of the Coloureds in the disadvantaged communities as well as the inability of local government to stabilize the community or to provide necessary resources to them. Legget (2004) states that, in the Western Cape, coloured people were resettled under Apartheid into high-density 'dormitory communities' in the Cape Flats. This has resulted in high density or

crowded housing (especially in urban areas) creating high concentrations of jobless people who need money to pay for rent, food and services. Although the Cape Flats represents the largest of such settlements, towns all over the province were subject to similar segregation under Apartheid legislation (Sullivan, 2005). Despite a new political era, the majority of coloured people are still living under these marginalised conditions in disadvantaged communities (Bekker & Cramer, 2003). With so little room in their homes, children spend a lot of time on the streets (Legget, 2004). Children who are not adequately supervised at home may look for social support and entertainment to peer groups, rather than their family members.

Legget (2004) gives statistics that indicate that substance abuse is a major factor in creating a violent environment in disadvantaged coloured communities. South African research has shown that many victims and offenders of violence had high levels of alcohol in their systems (Shaw & Louw, 1997; Peden, 2000). There is a long history of alcohol abuse in the coloured community, encouraged through the 'dop system' (that is still prevalent on some wine farms) of paying labourers wage in alcohol. It is thus not surprising that the coloured population experiences such high rates of violence (Thomson, 2004).

Legget (2004) attribute the problems experienced by Coloureds to the feelings of social exclusion or alienation created by the history of discrimination. These problems, some of which have been discussed, include a high unemployment rate, poverty, overcrowded housing conditions, substance

abuse, and high levels of criminal and domestic violence (Van der Merwe & Dawes, 2000). As mentioned, overcrowding leads to a street-bound youth where children and adolescents are exposed to gangsterism. Furthermore, unemployment and poverty also increases the risk of criminal activity and violence, often as part of organised crime in a gang environment. It is therefore clear that the prevalence of gangsterism is contributing to the problems faced by these communities.

The white population descends largely from the colonial immigrants of the late 17th, 18th and 19th centuries who were predominantly Dutch, German, French Huguenot and British. Linguistically it is divided along Afrikaans- and English-speaking groups. Because of their origin, white South Africans subscribe to a western culture that values the autonomous self, competition, achievement, and independence highly (Peltzer, 1995). The Apartheid era saw the Whites as the privileged group who enjoyed special benefits from the system like job reservation, foreign investment attracted by cheap labour and a prosperous economy whilst the Blacks and Coloureds were being marginalised and discriminated against (Morris, 2004). Meyer, Loxton and Boulter (1997) emphasise the importance of schools for the attainment of amongst other things social competence. Because white children were the privileged with regard to education, they were taught more life skills and social competence. However, the development of these concepts was denied to the majority of South African children during Apartheid. This may have had an impact on violence in the country. Whites have indeed not endured the negativities of Apartheid, even though young white males were conscripted for
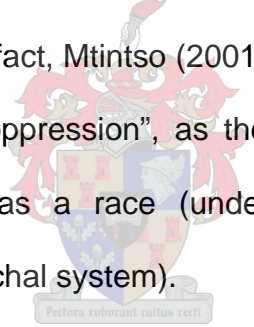
military service for two years mainly to maintain the Apartheid system. In post-Apartheid South Africa, white people have given up their political power and Afrikaans-speaking people have experienced that their language is under threat (Korf & Malan, 2002). Since the first democratic elections in 1994 especially white males have also experienced discrimination in the workforce through affirmative action and employment equity.

Because the present study also focuses on gender differences, it is important to look at differences and possible similarities among the cultural groups with regard to gender roles and socialisation in order to ascertain the impact of these factors on the relationship between aggression and social competence. In South Africa, it is very important to note that a predominant system of patriarchy exists among all three cultural groups participating in this study, whereby women are dominated by men and male control exists at almost all levels of society (Mtintso, 2001). Abrahams, Hoffman, Jewkes, and Laubscher (2004) refer to the general prevalence of ideas among South African men on patriarchal notions of masculinity involving distinctly hierarchical gender positions and definitions of male success in terms of controlling women. The roles that men and women are expected to fulfil in the society differ tremendously. Men are expected to be strong, controlled, firm, protective, assertive, and to assert themselves and fight for what they want. Women are expected to be gentle, kind, supportive and emotional and are taught to care for and nurture others and support their husbands (Angless & Shefer, 1997). The man is the head of the household and controls the woman who has to be unquestionably obedient. Albie Sach's statement that "it is a

sad fact that one of the profoundly non-racial institutions in South Africa is patriarchy" is cited by Cloete (1992) to highlight the problem. In support of this, Jewkes, Levin, and Penn-Kekana (2002) argue that gender socialisation within South African communities plays a major role in making women more vulnerable to violence as it upholds roles of submissive females and dominant males. De la Rey (1992) also points similarities regarding gender issues across South African cultures which see women being undervalued and evaluated negatively and which hold them responsible for child-rearing and household work. In 1996 Angless and Maconachie argued that men were afforded authority over their families and that women were viewed as men's property. Glanz and Spiegel (as cited in Theron et al., 2001) and Hirschmann (1998) make the point that South African women have been subjugated to the patriarchal society until the end of Apartheid, when this position was challenged and they started to challenge the restrictions and limitations on their lives. These included their new democracy on both political and domestic levels. They have been tremendously empowered through post-Apartheid labour legislation that promotes the equal rights of males and females and have paved the way for a process of emancipation of all females in this country. However, Mtintso (2001) comments that women still experience different forms of male domination and oppression according to their class, status, religion, race and even cultural backgrounds. It stretches much further than just the domestic scene, according to Fester (2003), as many aspects of life still promote the rule of fathers/husbands who control the lives of women. Gender relations are inherently unequal. Patriarchy has also been successfully promoted at all levels of society in the past and it will be difficult

to eliminate that in a short period of time. It seems as if patriarchy combined with cultural demands elevates the problem of gender inequality in South Africa.

Magwasa (1997) points out that the black (i.e. Xhosa) culture is highly patriarchal and that most of the power, control and authority are in the hands of the males with absolute female obedience. Kynoch (1999) observes that the domination of girls and women was central to the identification of many black males. This is also evident in the custom where men pay lobola when marrying women. Ngconco (1993) emphasises that black women are not encouraged to think independently and those who do so are seen to be treading on male territory. In fact, Mtintso (2001) feels that black women have been submitted to a "triple oppression", as they were exploited as a class (cheap labour), oppressed as a race (under Apartheid legislation) and dominated as women (patriarchal system).

Motsemme (2003) discusses the dilemma of black women in the post-Apartheid era where they have opportunities to advance careerwise and economically at the expense of black men but are subsequently perceived as too powerful or ambitious and have "either been labelled as menacing witches, cigarette-smoking whores, or frustrated lesbians." This links closely with Campbell's (cited in Hirschmann, 1998) observation that there is a crisis in masculinity among black South African males: She links the current violence in the country with a more general crisis of masculinity that has developed in the identity of working class township men. The argument, in

brief, suggests that in a patriarchal social order men are socialized to be powerful. In working class communities strong emphasis is also placed on masculinity. When masculinity is severely threatened, violence is one of a range of compensatory responses used by men. Oppressed in both race and class in terms of Apartheid and South Africa's particular form of racial capitalism, the socially sanctioned power of black men over women and children in the family was often the only arena in which these men were able to exercise dominance. More recently black men have been threatened increasingly on a number of fronts. Fathers are often not able to provide for the most basic needs of family members; therefore they feel humiliated and emasculated. In addition, there has been the growing role of youth in shaping community opinion, so reducing the fathers' dominant role in community affairs and decision-making. Campbell's views are supported by Glanz and Spiegel (1996) and Simpson (1993).
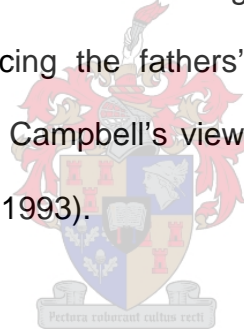
Coloured males and females have also suffered tremendously under the Apartheid system which saw them being forcefully removed from their homes and placed in marginalised crowded housing conditions (Legget, 2004; Van Wyk, 2001). In the process of being removed, coloured people lost their houses and businesses and had to start again with very limited access to income opportunities. Many males, being unemployed and poor, can not provide for their families and are thus emasculated and humiliated. They also feel that, on political level, their voices are not heard (Steenkamp, 2004). The fact that these coloured men who feel inferior in the outside world can regain some sense of power at home could be related to domestic violence. It is

also not surprising that substance abuse and associated violence is so prevalent in disadvantaged coloured communities especially among these disempowered males (Van der Merwe & Dawes, 2000). The culture of gangsterism adds to these problems, as it promotes patriarchal male constructs. Luyt and Foster (2001) have found that patriarchal traits are more prevalent in those communities where gangsterism is rife and that male adolescents define their masculinity through these constructs of power, status and toughness. Through this process they may have developed fairly well-developed assertiveness skills.

Coloured females are subjected to these patriarchal systems and are most often on the receiving end of the domestic violence in their relationships and communities (Artz & Kunisaki, 2003). Poverty, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse are the most important contributors to domestic violence. The effects of domestic violence on children and adolescents in affected households are severe and they are conditioned to regard violence as an acceptable means of resolving problems. This, combined with gender socialisation, increase the vulnerability of females to domestic and other violence in South African communities (Jewkes et al., 2002) as it promotes the roles of submissive females and authoritarian males. It seems as if teenage pregnancies and subsequent single mother families are on the increase in disadvantaged coloured communities (Nel, 2004; Van Wyk, 2001). It limits adolescent girls' educational prospects (Palmary, 2003) and places huge responsibilities on adolescent mothers who are still in the adolescent development phase. It could be argued that they have not yet developed

sufficient and appropriate social skills to deal with the demands on an interpersonal level, for example conflict management skills.

White women are also affected by the patriarchal nature of the South African social and familial structures. During the Apartheid era they occupied a contradictory position in the sense that they were, as white South Africans, the privileged oppressor, but as women they stood under an authoritarian patriarchy. Mtintso (2001) argues that white women exploited their domestic workers in an effort to escape the socially predicted gender roles under the patriarchal system. With the fall of Apartheid, white women are also considered to be previously disadvantaged under the new government's Employment Equity Act (Number 55 of 1998) to a certain degree and they therefore also have the opportunity to advance careerwise and economically at the expense of white males.
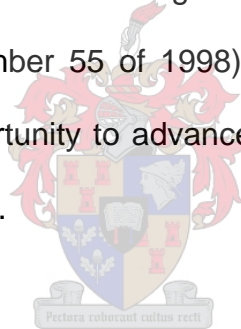
White males, on the other hand, have been privileged in all aspects by Apartheid – their legal, political and economic capacity was that of power – which, combined with their domestic patriarchal power, gave them superiority over any other group in South Africa. The fall of Apartheid lead to the severe disempowerment of this group and they were immediately faced with retrenchment and insecurity in their jobs. White male participants in this study probably face an uncertain career future where they can no longer rely on their powerful position to secure well paid jobs. The same argument regarding the crisis of and the threat to masculinity experienced by black males (and it could be extrapolated to a lesser degree to coloured males who

experienced the same limitations under the former Apartheid system) is directly applicable to white males post-Apartheid. In fact, it can be argued that the effect on white males are more severe as they have suddenly moved from a powerful and masculine position to a situation where their futures and income potential are uncertain and threatened, while black and coloured men have, at least, more positive career prospects through the Employment Equity Act, Number 55 of 1998.

Employment equity also has an impact on women's emancipation in post-Apartheid as gender equity is a major component of the act and sees women enjoying far more promising career prospects and equal rights than in the Apartheid era. Most recently the commitment to gender equity was reiterated both by President Thabo Mbeki in his State of the Nation Address on 11 February 2005 and by Mr Trevor Manual, the Minister of Finance, in Budget 2005. Women are therefore being empowered and gaining independence from men which will also have an effect on their behaviour. In this transitional phase women's emancipation and independence from men is in direct opposition with the patriarchal system and men's expectations about the role of women. It can thus be expected that this will have a strong influence on women's behaviour and levels of aggression.

3   THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

There seems to be considerable controversy over the origin of aggression in humans (Geen, 2001). The nature and causes of aggression form the basis for many theories and research across various disciplines indicates that aggression is probably a product of a number of interacting factors, including genetic, physiological, familial, and learning (Huesmann & Miller, 1994). Social competence has also received a great deal of attention by researchers over the last couple of decades and there were many attempts to capture the origin of this concept (Silvera et al., in press). Because both direct and indirect aggression and social competence form an important focus of the present study, a selective review of some of the theories that have relevance to, as far as possible, both these concepts is discussed below. Both aggression and social competence are considered by many researchers (as is evident from the discussion that follows) as learned behaviour and for that reason many theories are applicable to both these concepts.

Geen (2001) reports that students of Biological Theories argue that one can use studies of behaviour of animals biologically close to humans (primates) to extrapolate human behaviour. Such studies with a biological basis that are relevant to the present study have shown that social competence is strongly associated with an animal's ability to use aggression appropriately. For example, the socially competent animal will know to inhibit its aggression in the presence of a dominant male of the species, but will act aggressively in other situations when it is appropriate to do so rather than to withdraw.

Social learning theories suggest that exposure to acts of aggression (either as witness, victim or participant) increases the probability that adolescents will engage in future aggression and violence (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). One such theory is Bandura's (1973) Social Learning Theory which proposes that aggressive behaviour is primarily learned and maintained through environmental experiences either directly or through modelling. In practice aggressive behaviour may be acquired when an individual attempts it and is rewarded with a positive outcome, but it will be avoided in future if it was punished. Furthermore, aggression can also be learned through observation. By watching an influential role-model engage in an act of aggression which has positive outcomes, might result in the observer acquiring this behaviour. Through such observation of the aggressive actions of models in the community and in modelling adult modes of conflict management, patterns of aggressive behaviour are passed on from one generation to the next (Van der Merwe & Dawes, 2000) as the child or adolescent develops an elementary understanding of certain rules of conduct and a repertoire of aggressive behaviour is built (Geen, 2001). The more influential the model, the stronger the effect will be as people would rather imitate the behaviour of people whom they consider to be attractive or powerful. The same applies for the maintenance of aggressive behaviour which is subject to the principles of reinforcement by the environment. In his theory, Bandura also emphasises reciprocal determination which argues that internal mental events (expectations, beliefs, self-perceptions), external environmental contingencies and overt behaviour are intra-dependent to a certain degree. This means that conditioning is not a mechanical process in which people are passive

participants but that people actively seek out and process information about their environment to maximise favourable outcomes. The processes of social learning therefore depend on the child or adolescent's mental representations of events in the social environment and his/her expectancies of future outcomes of aggressive acts and the utility or value that aggression may have for him/her. This is consistent with the Expectancy-Value Theory of Reinforcement (Geen, 2001) as well as findings by Crick and Dodge (1994) that favourable expectations for the outcomes of physically and verbally aggressive behaviour are positively related to engagement in aggressive behaviour. In addition to forming expectancies of the outcome of aggression, the child or adolescent also develops a sense of confidence in his or her ability to execute the necessary aggression – this is called self-efficacy expectancies (Geen, 2001).

Bandura's (1973) Social Learning Theory is also directly applicable on social competence. As in the case of aggression, social competence also presents itself as behaviour and as such, it can also be learned and maintained through observation of influential models displaying the behaviour. Such observation provides a child or adolescent with a range of social skills that can be applied in various contexts within the social arena. The Expectancy-Value Theory of Reinforcement (Geen, 2001) could also be applied on social skills as an adolescent's beliefs about his/her social environment and his/her anticipation of the outcome and consequences of applying social skills may influence the process of learning and applying such skills.

The Social Information-Processing Model (Crick & Dodge, 1994) states that a person has a set of biologically limited abilities and a database of memories of past experiences. When confronted with social cues, their behavioural response is a function of six sequential steps of processing these cues. These steps are:

> (1) encoding of cues stemming from actions of oneself and others, (2) interpretation of those cues, (3) clarification of the goals of the interaction after the relevant information has been assimilated, (4) the search for, and gaining access to, responses to the situation as defined, (5) the decision to select one of the available responses for the present situation and, (6) behaviour enactment of the chosen response (p. 76).

A person who is skillful at processing each step will act socially competent within a situation, whereas abnormal or biased processing will lead to deficit social behaviour (including aggression). Research has shown that aggressive children in general display distinctive social information-processing patterns (Crick & Dodge, 1996). These patterns probably stem from a deficit in their processing techniques and the belief that aggression is an appropriate way to manage conflict. Huesmann (1994) builds onto Crick and Dodge's model when he highlights the important role of normative beliefs in the decision to engage in aggressive behaviour. Normative beliefs are individualistic cognitive standards about the acceptability of behaviour. If a person observes that aggressive behaviour is the norm among his role models, his/her normative beliefs will be favourable towards aggression which increases the probability that he/she will display aggression.

The Conflict Theory of Dahrendorf (1968) is based on the assumption that conflict is normal and inevitable in human relations and interactions. Conflict is not the root of the problem but rather the destructive and maladaptive ways in which people tend to respond to conflict. Violence is thus a maladaptive mode of interpersonal conflict management when other efforts or means to solve the conflict have failed due to inadequate or lack of conflict management skills or the lack of perceived options. Results of several South African research studies (Olivier, 2000; Sathiparsad, 2003; Vogel, 2002) are congruent with this model as it indicates that South African youth revert to aggression because they lack effective conflict management skills.

Developmental psychologists have formulated a number of sequential theories involving social competence that are relevant for the understanding of different forms of aggression. A developmental theory that is relevant for the present research is presented by Björkqvist et al. (1992a, b) who recognized a distinct pattern in the development of direct and indirect aggression. They base their development theory on a number of studies in which young children, who have not yet developed verbal and social skills to any considerable degree, were observed to resort to direct physical aggression. Young children will mostly engage in physical aggression. However, as they grow older and their ability to reason develops in conjunction with the development of verbal and social skills, they start to make more use of indirect and manipulative aggression. When social competence develops sufficiently, the expression of aggression is facilitated in such a way that the individual does not have to resort to physical aggression
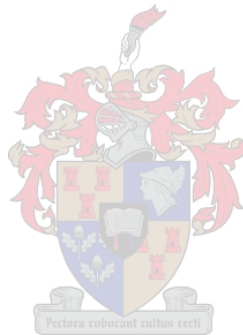
any more. Instead, the individual is capable of indirect aggressive behaviour through which social manipulation alone could be used to induce psychological and sometimes even physical harm to a target person, without putting the individual at direct risk of retaliation from the receiver. These developmental phases partly follow and partly overlap and do not stop at adolescence, but continue to develop into adulthood, so that it can be expected that direct and indirect aggression co-exist in adolescence and adulthood.

Björkqvist et al. (1994) use the effect/danger ratio to explain the individual choice of aggressive strategy and the general appeal of indirect aggression. The aggressor will naturally want to maximize the effect of his/her actions whilst minimising his/her exposure to risks or danger. These risks or danger can be psychological, physical or social. The social risks are dependent on the cultural acceptance or norms with regard to aggression in the society in question.

Richardson and Green (1999) suggest the Social Sanction Model to explain the social risks involved with direct aggression. Aggression should be evaluated within the context of the situation to determine whether it is socially appropriate behaviour. For example, it is acceptable for young boys (and they are often encouraged) to play with toy guns and they earn the respect of their peers when they display direct aggression to retaliate or to gain control. However, it is socially completely unacceptable for a middle-aged businessman to display direct aggression as a means to obtain his goals.

Besides role models and social acceptance of behaviour and other factors associated with the theories mentioned here, there are also numerous additional factors that may contribute to an individual's levels of aggression and social competence. These factors include but are not limited to low socio-economic status, unemployment, substance abuse, environmental factors, patriarchy (especially in the South African context), and neglect.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Aggression and Social Competence

Aggressive behaviour is most likely to be condemned in the majority of cultures, at least as far as direct physical aggression is concerned (Österman, Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, Kaukiainen, Huesmann, & Fraczek, 1994). The reason for the development of more refined strategies may thus be based on social pressure and cultural disapproval of aggressive behaviour. Aggressive behaviour is in general socially undesirable and, through indirect strategies, it can be hidden. Research studies have indeed found that (direct) aggressive people don't have sufficient social competence (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Richardson et al., 1998). Indirect forms of aggression are much more acceptable than direct aggression, while still effective and may even replace strategies that are more direct (Björkqvist et al., 1992a, b). Consequently, it is expected that adults in general will only display direct physical aggression in very extreme situations (Björkqvist et al., 1992a). This viewpoint is strongly supported by Harris and Knight-Bohnhoff (1996a, b) who have consistently found a negative relationship between age and direct aggression and report that human beings engage in fewer acts of direct aggression as they get older. Forrest, Eatough, and Shevlin (2005) have also found a significant direct correlation between indirect aggression and age. This could be explained by Richardson and Green's (1999) Social Sanction model as well as the developmental theory of Björkqvist et al. (1992 a, b).

Literature research indicates that social competence is an important factor that plays a role in an individual's level of direct and indirect aggression

(Richardson et al., 1998). As mentioned in the discussion on developmental theories for direct and indirect aggression, studies done by Björkqvist et al. (1992a, b) have revealed a positive correlation between the development of especially indirect aggression and social competence and they have concluded that the use of indirect aggression requires a relatively high level of social competence. In fact, Björkqvist et al. (2000) have found that social competence is required for both indirect aggression and peaceful conflict resolution, because interpersonal conflict management and empathy are essential to solve conflict in a peaceful manner. However, in order to manipulate social networks as in indirect aggression, social competence skills, like initiating relationships (in order to set up such a network) are equally essential. This is in direct contrast to what Richardson and Green (2003) have concluded. They have found that indirect aggression does not really require a carefully planned strategy that involves insight and forethought and social competence, but that it may actually rather be associated with a *lack* of some social skills such as negative assertion and conflict management.

Letendre et al. (2003) have found that the acquisition of prosocial skills in groups of children resulted in decreased aggressive behaviour. Similarly, Fry (1998) suggests that aggression could be reduced by introducing non-violent informal and formal mechanisms to deal with conflict. Burleson (2003) has done extensive research on the concept of empathy (or providing emotional support) which is one of the domains of social competence considered in the present study. He considers it to be one of the key processes in close

relationships. He conceptualises emotional support as expressions of care, concern, love, and interest, especially during times of upset or stress. Emotional support also encompasses helping distressed others work through their problems by listening to them, empathising with them, legitimising and actively exploring their feelings. Empathy has been found to be negatively associated with aggression (Björkqvist et al., 2000; Farrington, 2002; Richardson, Hammock, Smith, Gardner, & Signo, 1994).

Based on international research done on the association between violence and social competence, Palmary (2003) suggests that adapted internationally designed social competence training programmes should be considered for the parents and youth at risk in South Africa with the aim to reduce aggression. She suggests further that such programmes should also include empathy, conflict management and effective communication skills, three domains closely related to the present study. Local research of importance in this regard supports international findings and indicates that social competence lead to prosocial behaviour: A cognitive/behavioural social competence training programme was implemented over a period of seven months on a group of children at the Mary Cook Children's Home in Natal (Rens, 1991). There was a significant increase in prosocial behaviour (including the ability to initiate and maintain conversation and an improvement in interpersonal conflict management). However, no significant decrease in levels of aggression was reported. On the other hand, Olivier (2000) reports international research that indicate that British children with low social competence display higher levels of aggression and that children who are

exposed to violence are desensitised to aggression and tend to be more aggressive. It has also been found that social competence is a resilience factor in crime and violence and that an emotional responsive family serves as a protective factor for children and adolescents (Palmary, 2003). Based on their research, Palmary and Moat (2002) have found that young people require a range of interpersonal and social skills, including empathy and conflict management skills, in order to develop optimally and to reduce violent and criminal behaviour. They advise local government in South Africa to implement more social skills training (especially conflict resolution skills and empathy training) at schools to prevent aggressive behaviour. However, Roper (2002) found that effective conflict management skills implemented as part of the Schools Mediation and Reconciliation Training Program (SMART) were not very successful in reducing aggression due to other factors overshadowing its effect:

> (I)t became clear to the IPT (Independent Project Trust) that while conflict management training was a necessary part of a violence reduction process, the high levels of gang activity, carrying of weapons, bullying and victimisation of learners (and teachers) within the school and community, impacted on the ability of participants to actually use their new skills. Therefore IPT decided to examine conflict management within a broader intervention strategy (p 75).

Mkhondo (1995) reports on an intervention program implemented in a Johannesburg prison through which empathy training resulted in an increased understanding of the impact of violence on victims. Petersen (1998) reports a small pilot social skills training programme in Lavender Hill in Cape Town

called Copes (Community Psychological Empowerment Services) that is implemented by the CCR (Center for Conflict Resolution). This project undertakes similar interventions to tackle issues of violent behaviour and aggression among school children. It was found that participants in this programme displayed significantly less aggression as a result of the intervention. A prominent ongoing programme in South Africa that aim to reduce violence through, among other strategies social competence training is the Youth Violence Prevention Programme of the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2002) of which the Safe School Project forms an important part. The Safe Schools Project aims to provide learners with effective non-violent alternatives for conflict resolution.

4.2 Gender Perspectives

Gender differences in aggression have been widely researched but it seems as if studies involving specifically direct and indirect aggression in this regard emerged only relatively recently. Björkqvist and Niemelä (1992) state that gender research in aggression has suffered under male bias, as most studies on human aggression have been conducted by males on male subjects and the focus has been on typical physical aggression, even when female aggression was the object of the research. It is therefore not surprising that it has often been suggested in general that males are more aggressive than females. The statement by Björkqvist and Niemelä may be justified by the biological fact that males are, in general, physically stronger than females and tend to display more physical aggression. It has become a generally accepted social norm that a certain amount of physical aggression is socially

acceptable for young boys but not for girls of the same age. This is supported by research done by Crick and Dodge (1994) and Lagerspetz, Björkqvist and Peltonen (1988) which revealed that boys used *direct* means of aggression (physical and verbal) and girls relied more on *indirect* means (gossiping and manipulation of social structure) in order to harm their enemies. Geen (2001) elaborates on this finding, namely that

> (a) boys use direct physical and verbal aggression more than girls until late adolescence, when both genders show a decrease to equal low levels of physical aggressiveness and girls become more verbally aggressive than boys; (b) in early adolescence, boys are more physically aggressive than girls and (c) from late childhood to late adolescence, girls use indirect and relational aggression more than boys (p.78).

Similar to the findings of Lagerspetz et al. (1988) for children, Baron and Richardson (1994) have found for adults that there is an indication that adult males tend to display more direct (physical) aggression than females but that females may show higher levels of indirect aggression. Other research also supports the finding that males are more physically aggressive than females (Bushman & Anderson, 1998; Graham, 2001). Björkqvist et al. (2000) argues that gender socialisation affects friendship patterns, and that, as a result of this, males tend to socialise in large groups with loose boundaries, whereas females prefer smaller, close-knitted circles of friendship where they discuss emotions and relations to a greater extent than males. Whereas this might equip females with better social skills in terms of providing emotional support, disclosing personal information and even interpersonal conflict management,

such friendship structures are also fertile soil for the implementation of manipulative aggressive strategies such as indirect aggression. Fry (1998) and Theron, et.al (2001) also found tentative evidence from cross-cultural research that women may make greater use of indirect aggression than men, who rely more on physical and direct aggression.

However, Björkqvist, Österman, and Lagerspetz (1994) have found that, although young girls display more indirect aggression than boys, gender differences regarding indirect aggression almost disappear among adults. Even though there seems to be no significant gender differences between adults regarding indirect aggression, they have found that males display a definite preference for rational-appearing aggression and females tend to focus more on social manipulation. This is consistent with Richardson and Green's (1999) findings in their research with adults. Barnett (2004) states that although men commit more violent acts than women, it does not mean that they experience more aggression than women. Rather, she has found that even though women seem to use less overt means to show their aggression, they are at least as aggressive as men. She also points out that men are just as likely as women to engage in relational or indirect aggression – spreading rumours, excluding others, and gossiping. Forrest et al. (2005) come to the same conclusion, namely that men and women do not differ in their use of indirect aggression.

Very little research on gender differences between direct and indirect aggression had been done on groups within South Africa, especially on late

adolescents. Recent empirical research was conducted in the Eastern Cape to elicit teachers' perceptions of school safety in disadvantaged communities (De Wet, 2003). The teachers indicated that boys were mostly the overt aggressors, but that girls are becoming increasingly more aggressive with some of them being armed. This increased violence by girls is considered to be a form of self-defense against sexual assault and physical violence from male learners. It could be due to the post-apartheid empowerment of girls that enable them to challenge patriarchy and to become more assertive. A study among adolescent learners in a privileged South African school showed that male learners engaged more in typical direct aggressive behaviour whereas female learners resorted to typical indirect aggression (Olivier, 2003). However, Möller (2001) found no significant differences in neither direct nor indirect aggression among genders across different cultures in similar groups of student participants as those in the present study.
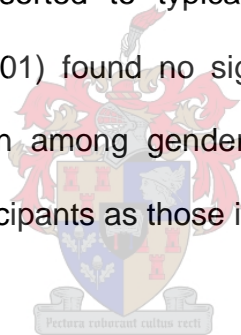
Gender differences in social skills are also reported. Crick and Dodge (1994) report that girls are more interpersonally oriented (i.e. display more prosocial behaviour and cooperation and are more concerned about social approval) than boys, who appear to be more instrumentally oriented (i.e. more physically aggressive, concerned about controlling external events, and more dominating towards peers). Österman, Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, Landau, Fraczek, and Patorelli (1997) have reported in a cross-cultural study that females are better at conflict resolution than their male counterparts who resort easier than females to aggressive strategies in attempting to solve conflict situations. They explain this in part by claiming that females are better

than males at both decoding and encoding non-verbal signs and that girls mature socially faster than boys. Lennon and Eisenberg (cited in Björkqvist et al., 2000) and Ford (1982) have found that empathy increases with age and that girls are in general significantly more empathetic than boys. Burleson (2003) have also found that both men and women value emotional support equally high in relationships, but that women tend to produce empathic behaviour more than men.

4.3 Social and Cultural Considerations in the South African Context

No cross-cultural studies on the subject of a possible relationship between social competence and direct and indirect aggression could be found in the South African context. The present study is an exploratory attempt to investigate such a relationship among a multi-cultural student sample of late adolescents and young adults in South Africa. The multi-cultural composition of the population could not be ignored when planning research on aggression in South Africa, as many international studies in this regard suggest cross-cultural differences in levels of direct and indirect aggression. Theron et al. (2001) have reported a significant difference in aggression levels between white female South African and Spanish students. South African participants reported lower overall aggression than their Spanish counterparts with also a smaller difference between direct and indirect aggression. Cross-cultural evidence for different levels of aggression is supported by White and Kowalski (1998) and Fry (1998) also found that a cross-cultural consideration of aggression shows that cultural influences strongly affect the expression of both female and male aggression. Österman et al. (1998) have found cross-

cultural differences in different types of aggression and conclude that aggression is a type of behaviour often governed by strict norms, so that cultural differences can be expected as a certain type of behaviour that is accepted in one culture may be considered aggressive or hostile in another.

No relevant cross-cultural studies with regard to social competence that would support the hypotheses of the present study could be found.

Little comparative cross-cultural research had been done on aggression in South Africa. However, Möller (2001) has found in her study that coloured people in the Western Cape tend to display more direct aggression than their black and white counterparts. This is supported by recent statistics which indicate that coloureds are more than twice as likely to be murdered than black people who are second on the list (Thomson, 2004) which may indicate that they are more exposed to violence than other cultures. Netshiombo (1994) also found that many black youths in South Africa have, as a result of the country's political, social and economic past, been left with a legacy of violence according to which they accept aggression as part of everyday life. It is possible that white youths have, on the other hand, been sheltered from such exposure. This is an important factor to consider, as the participants in this study were children during the era of Apartheid.

Before embarking on a cross-cultural research study in the South African context, it is thus important to understand the social, cultural and gender

influences that may cause variations in both levels of aggression and of social competence.

Children and adolescents who grow up in a dangerous or violent context and who are thus constantly exposed to aggression are at risk to display aggressive behaviour themselves. The more direct the exposure to aggression and violence is, the more severe the impact will be on children and adolescents (Salzinger, Feldman, Stockhammer, & Hood, 2002). In a recent local study it was found that the majority of a sample of 104 adolescents in Cape Town had been exposed to at least one type of violent event either as a victim or a witness (Ward, Flisher, Muller, & Lombard, 2001). South African research had also shown that adolescents' exposure to violence either as a victim or a witness impacted negatively on their cognitive, emotional and social development (Collings & Magojo, 2003; Osofsky, 1995; Stevens, Wyngaard & Van Niekerk, 2001). Research by Pietersen (2002) as well as Wynchank (2000) also found that high exposure to violence had a negative impact on coloured adolescents' social development. It was found in these studies that reduced social competence and social adjustment problems resulting from the exposure to violence impaired these adolescents' relationships with peers and family members. Furthermore, Du Plooy (2002) and Van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) determined that exposure to traumatic violence in disadvantaged communities resulted in aggressive and impulsive behaviour and problems with emotional regulation. In an international study, Wolf, Jaffee, Wilson and Zak (1986) have identified lower social competence

and a deficit in abilities associated with empathy as prevalent among children who witness domestic violence.

Each cultural group considered in the present study seem to face different socio-cultural factors that play a role in their reported levels of aggression, but there seem to also be, to a large extent, similarities especially between the black and coloured groups. Both these groups were restrained severely under the former Apartheid system while white people were the beneficiaries of the system. The violence used by the government during that period was countered by more violence in the so-called Struggle (the resistance movement). It is therefore of great interest in the present study to consider cultural factors in both aggression and social competence.

Barbarin (1999) found that black South African children living under similar conditions as African American children displayed less antisocial behaviour. It was suggested that this may be a result of higher levels of community support – probably due to the ubuntu system where members within the community support each other strongly. It seems as if this aspect of the black culture in South Africa is a protective or resilience factor. On the other hand, a study involving Xhosa-speaking adolescent girls in Khayelitsha found that violence against young women in sexual relationships are widespread and severe (Wood, Maforah, & Jewkes, 1996). In a similar study in Soweto (cited in Matthews, Griggs & Caine, 1999) it was found that a large number of black male youth feel that, within their own future families, violence will be used as a

means of discipline both for their wives and their own children. In fact, Matthews et al. (1999) contends that

> (t)his "culture of violence" became particularly embedded in the townships which bore the brunt of the traumatic affects of both struggle politics and institutionalised racism and where the cycle of violence is exacerbated by poor socioeconomic conditions. This is a community in which fighting is a common practice; where social status is gained by carrying a gun and the romanticised portrayal of "hero's funerals" are encouraged. Within this culture, young people often lack self esteem and personal confidence, positive role models are few and negative images make crime more attractive (p. 5).

Matthews et al. (1999) also cite research involving black males aged 16 to 25 years in Alexandra that clearly shows that exposure to violence leads to desensitization and subsequent aggressive behaviour displayed by the observer:
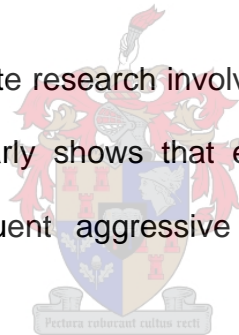
> The researcher asked, "Why it is so easy to kill?" And the answer was: "We are used to people dying. Death has become a common feature of our life in Alexandra. We see death every day, we no longer fear death. To us death has become a way of life". The more the culture of violence becomes embedded in social institutions, the higher the tolerance for crime and violence (p. 5).

This example supports Huesmann's (1994) version of the Social Information Processing Theory that states that these adolescents not only learned behaviour (in this case aggression) from influential role models around them, but that their normative beliefs about violence became favourable towards

aggression. Such normative beliefs favouring violence is also illustrated by research involving black gangsters in Soweto who indicated that "the most striking feature of their world is their despairing nihilistic attitude to violence and killings and the sense that violence is enlivening and even dignifying" (CSVR, 1998). The CSVR research study further highlights a gross desensitisation to violence, murdering and death and the lack of empathy and compassion expressed by the participants. This study shows, again, that a negative correlation between aggression and social skills may exist.

There is significant literature available on violence in the coloured communities. Pietersen (2002) has found that the majority of violence and aggressive behaviour in and around the Cape Metropole is concentrated within disadvantaged coloured communities. Studies by Wynchank (2000) and Pietersen (2002) involving coloured communities on the Cape Flats also showed that a large number of adolescents were witness to or victim of or participant in violent gang activities. Van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) blame factors such as poor family cohesion, lack of rewards for prosocial behaviour and ineffective punishment of antisocial behaviour for the observed antisocial conduct of coloured youth. Van der Hoven (2001) points out the role of alcohol consumption in the high prevalence of domestic violence in the disadvantaged coloured. Adolescents growing up in affected households are therefore at considerable risk to experience or witness violence within their homes. Alcohol consumption and drug abuse may also be directly responsible for a lack of parental supervision in these households and the resulting possible neglect of adolescents which may reduce these

adolescents' resilience to violence. According to Bandura's (1973) Social Learning Theory domestic violence result in adolescents learning and internalising such aggressive behaviour through observing their parents' (who are major role models for them) behaviour. Huesmann's (1994) version of the Social Information Processing model can also be applied here, as children in violent households grow up learning that aggressive and violent behaviour are the norm among their role models, leading to their normative beliefs becoming favourable towards aggression. This increases the risk that these children will display aggression themselves.

Research shows that there is also a vast number of single mother households, often as a result of teenage pregnancies which is prevalent in disadvantaged coloured communities (Nel, 2004; Van Wyk, 2001). The fathers are often absent, leading to a lack of family structures and, with the mothers having to work long hours to provide an income for their households, these children and adolescents spend significant time on the streets. Another factor that drives children and adolescents to the streets is crowded housing conditions – with so little room the adolescents prefer to take to the streets (Legget, 2004). Because they spend so much time on the streets, adolescents tend to rely on peer groups for social support and entertainment and not on their families. They are also exposed to substance abuse and violence.

This high prevalence of aggression and violence must have an effect on coloured people's interpersonal behaviour. Van der Merwe and Dawes

(2000) have indeed found that there is a link between exposure to violence and antisocial behaviour among coloured youth in their study. This is also congruent with the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1973) which states that an individual repeats observed behaviour which he/she expects will hold some rewards. It could be that the coloured youth lack role models who display sufficient and appropriate social skills to them. Because they are not equipped with the necessary social competence to combat their exposure to violence and find peaceful resolutions to conflict, the cycle of violence is perpetuated.

White South Africans have a history tainted with violence as well. Although they were the beneficiaries of the Apartheid system, and have mostly been protected against exposure to violence (Botha & Van Vuuren, 1993), violence had to be used to uphold this system. Not only were thousands of young white males deployed in the South African Police Force to enforce stability within townships and other areas where people started opposing Apartheid, but they even had to defend it outside the country's borders. Large numbers of white young South African males were conscripted into the army of the South African Defense Force for a compulsory two year period and forced to defend the Apartheid state. Apartheid has also deformed the development of white children in a variety of ways (Duncan & Rock, 1997) and has distorted their perceptions of themselves and others by racist prejudice. Botha and Van Vuuren (1993) found that a startling number of white children admitted to enjoying acts of violence against black people on television. Frequent media reports of incidents of violence involving white youths as perpetrators against

black people highlights the way in which a legacy of violence for white people has been left behind as well.

4.4   Conclusion

South African and international research shows that violence and aggression are factors with a major impact on public health.   It can have a very detrimental effect on human potential and functioning.   With the exceptional high prevalence of violence in South Africa it is of utmost importance to address the issue.   The necessary social competence can reduce the levels of aggression significantly among the South African youth where the implementation of relevant social skills training programmes at school level should be seriously considered.
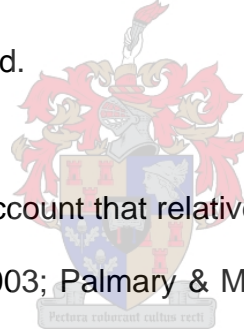
Following this and taking in account that relatively little South African research (Mkhondo, 1995; Palmary, 2003; Palmary & Moat, 2002; Rens, 1991; Roper, 2002) has been done on the relationship between social skills and aggression, especially across cultures, it is clear that the present study is of an exploratory nature.

5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature review discussed in earlier, the following hypotheses were postulated and investigated:

- A relationship between levels of direct and indirect aggression and the levels of social competence exists for the total group.

- A relationship between levels of direct and indirect aggression and the levels of social competence exists within each of the cultural groups participating in the study (black, coloured and white people).

- Gender differences in direct and indirect aggression exist within each of the black, coloured and white groups.

- Cross-cultural differences in direct and indirect aggression exist among males.

- Cross-cultural differences in direct and indirect aggression exist among females.

- Gender differences in social competence exist within each of the black, coloured and white groups.

- Cross-cultural differences in social competence levels exist.

6   METHOD

This quantitative study involved a cross-sectional research design in which a convenience sample of university students was used. This design was used to gain access to a large sample to increase the validity and to be able to generalise more readily to the groups from which the samples were drawn.

6.1   Participants

Data have been obtained from a total of 729 pre-graduate students from the Department of Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch and the Faculty of Arts at the University of the Western Cape. They have participated voluntarily in this study. The sample consisted of males and females from different cultural groups including a total of 172 black (91 males, 81 females), 238 coloured (102 males, 136 females) and 319 white (106 males, 213 females) participants. Data for a total of 36 Indian students was rejected as such a small group was not comparable to the other groups.

The participants were between the ages of 17 and 26 (average age was 20 years). They represent the developmental stages from late adolescence to young adulthood.

The black students' mother tongue was predominantly Xhosa, although the data also includes data from students speaking other South African black languages. Coloured students whose mother tongue is English and Afrikaans

respectively were nearly equal in number, but the white students were predominantly Afrikaans-speaking and around one-third English-speaking.

6.2 Questionnaires

An extensive evaluation of different measuring instruments for social competence and direct and indirect aggression was undertaken.

The target group consisted of different cultural groups and it was therefore necessary to find simple, straightforward instruments that would not leave room for various interpretations across cultural groups. However, the instrument measuring aggression should be able to discriminate clearly between direct and indirect aggression and the questionnaire assessing social competence should discriminate between different components of this concept.
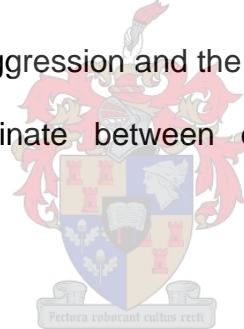
6.2.1 Richardson Conflict Response Questionnaire (RCRQ)

The RCRQ (Richardson, Green & Lago, 1996) was chosen because it is a relatively short and straightforward questionnaire and it discriminates between direct and indirect forms of aggression. A further reason for choosing the RCRQ was to enable meaningful comparison with a recent study on direct and indirect aggression levels across a multi-cultural sample of South African students (Möller, 2001) which also made use of this instrument.

The RCRQ is a self-report measure consisting of 28 items. Of these, 10 items measure direct aggression (e.g. "threw something at them" or "yelled or screamed at them") and 10 items measure indirect aggression (e.g. "gossiped

behind their back" or "made up stories to get them in trouble"). There are also 8 filler items. Most of the direct aggression items and also the eight filler items were selected from the Strauss (1979) Conflict Tactics Scale. Some of the indirect aggression items originated from the work of Zelli and Huesmann (1993), and Björkqvist, Österman et al. (1992) while others were developed by Richardson and Green (cited in Richardson & Green, 1999). The items are arranged from least to most harmful, resulting in most of the filler items included near the start of the questionnaire and direct aggression items closer towards the end of the instrument.

Each of the relevant items is rated on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often), depending on how frequently in the past month or so participants have engaged in the proposed aggressive behaviour.

Evidence of the validity of the RCRQ is provided by Richardson and Green in 1996 (cited in Richardson and Green, 1999). They have found that self- and peer-reports of direct and indirect aggression on this scale are moderately and significantly correlated (direct $r = 0.60$, indirect $r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, across various studies the correlation between direct and indirect aggression was 0.42, indicating that these concepts are related but independent.

6.2.2 Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ)

The ICQ (Buhrmester et al., 1988) was chosen because many of the items measuring social competence in this questionnaire are related to aggression,

as suggested already by the negative assertion and management of social conflict subscales of this instrument. The questionnaire is easy to understand and complete and it discriminates well between different subscales of social competence. It is also a relatively short questionnaire (only 40 items, compared with 105 items of the well-known and widely used Social Skills Inventory (SSI) (Reis, 1986).

The ICQ is a 40-item questionnaire that assesses five different domains of social competence, namely (a) initiating relationships, (b) negative assertion, (c) disclosing personal information, (d) providing emotional support and advice, and (e) managing social conflict. There are eight questions relating to each of these domains.

Each of these items describes an social interaction and is rated on a 5-point Levenson and Gottman scale to indicate the individual's level of competence and confidence in each of these situations (1 = "I'm poor at this; I'd feel so uncomfortable and unable to handle this situation, I'd avoid it if possible"; 2 = I'm only fair at this; I'd feel uncomfortable and have lots of difficulty handling this situation"; 3 = "I'm okay at this; I'd feel somewhat uncomfortable and have some difficulty handling this situation"; 4 = "I'm good at this; I'd feel quite comfortable and able to handle this situation"; 5 = "I'm extremely good at this; I'd feel comfortable and could handle this situation very well"). A high score indicates high competency in a specific domain.

The validity of the ICQ is reported in Buhrmester et al. (1988). Scores for each of the five domains were derived by averaging the individual items in the questionnaire for each domain. The internal Cronbach alphas had a mean of .83. Intercorrelations among the competence measures were moderate ranging from $r = 0.26$ to $r = 0.54$ with a mean $r = 0.42$. This indicates that one can generalise at a moderate level across the five domains. High correlations ($r = 0.68$ to $r = 0.84$) were found between corresponding dimensions of romantic and friend interactions which indicate that individual differences were quite stable across these two forms of interaction partners. Test-retest reliability for each of the domains was high: Initiation, $r = 0.89$; Negative Assertion, $r = 0.79$; Disclosure, $r = 0.75$; Emotional Support, $r = 0.74$; and Conflict Management, $r = 0.69$. Burhmester et al. (1988) furthermore report that there are various correlations between the ICQ and the SSI which provide furthermore evidence of the discriminant validity of ICQ subscales.
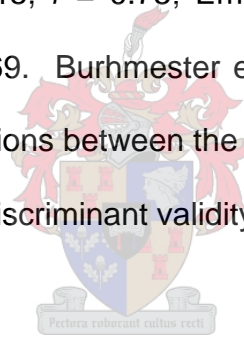
6.3 Procedure

Written requests to administer both questionnaires were sent to the University of Stellenbosch and the University of the Western Cape to get permission to perform this study. Pre-graduate students were approached by lecturers to voluntarily participate in the research during lecturing time. Lecturers assisted the present researcher with the completion of the questionnaires. The researcher has provided them with the questionnaires and they were sufficiently briefed on the instructions and procedures to be followed before these questionnaires were handed out to students. Subsequently, participants received the two questionnaires and the demographic

questionnaire from the lecturers. The questionnaires took participants about 40 minutes to complete. The participants have been clearly instructed to complete all the questions carefully and the fact that it was done anonymously was highlighted to improve the probability that they would answer the questions honestly. Afterwards, the researcher personally fetched the completed questionnaires from the lecturers.

7. RESULTS

To investigate the possible relationship between aggression and social competence as hypothesized, a non-linear Canonical Correlation Analysis (known as Overals)[1] was used to analyse the data for the total group. Such an analysis determines the association of two or more sets of variables. Two sets of variables were defined: the first set, Aggression, has two variables namely Direct and Indirect aggression. The second set, Social Competence has five variables, namely initiating relationships, disclosing information, negative assertion, providing emotional support and managing interpersonal conflict.

7.1 Correlations

The results of a two dimensional Canonical Correlation Analysis with variables treated at a numerical measurement scale are presented below. Table 1 summarizes the analysis and shows the eigenvalues, loss and fit.

Table 1

Summary of a Canonical Correlation with Two Sets (Aggression and Social Competence) and Two Dimensions

		Dimension		Sum
		1	2	
Loss	Set 1	.371	.427	.798
	Set 2	.371	.428	.800
	Mean	.371	.428	.799
Eigenvalue		.629	.572	

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[1] Overals is developed by the Data Theory Data System Group at the Leiden University (NL) and forms part the Categories package of SPSS.

Fit	1.201

The Canonical Correlations between both sets of variables for the first and second dimension for the whole group were respectively:

$$\rho_{d=1} = .26 \text{ and } \rho_{d=2} = .15$$

Although these correlations for the total group appear to be rather low, indicating that there was not really a strong correlation between aggression and social competence as such, the component loadings do suggest a relationship between some variables of these two sets or concepts. A graphical representation of these component loadings is given in Figure 1.

Dimension 1
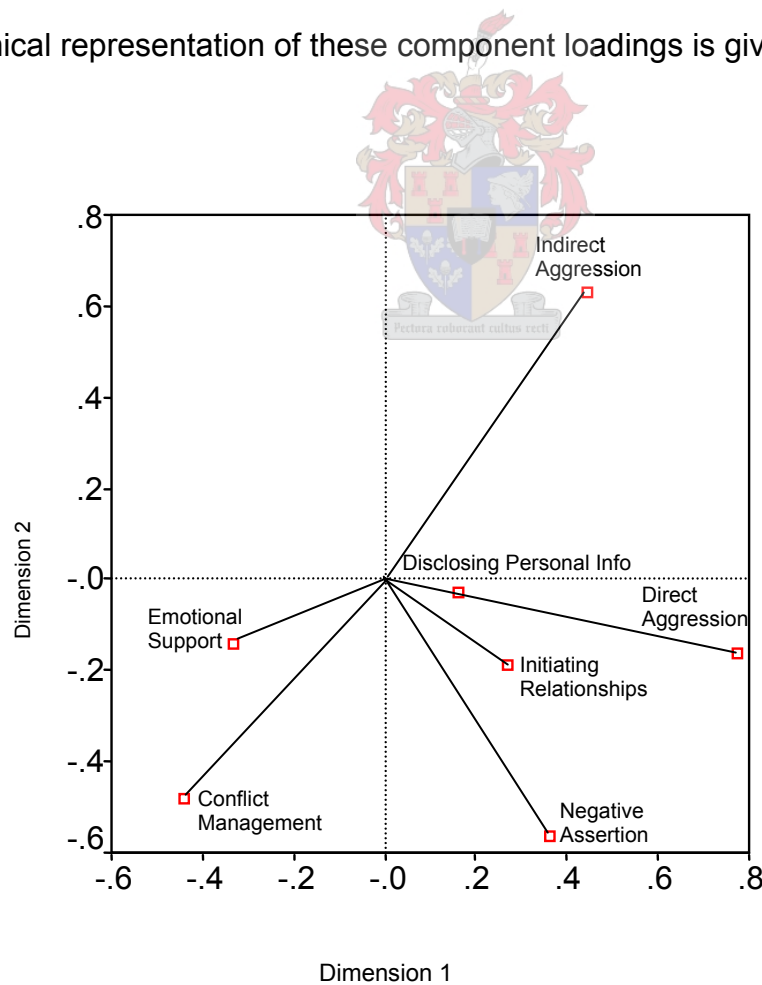
Figure 1. Graphical representation of the component loadings for the two sets (aggression and social competence)

The numerical values of these loadings are given in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Numerical Values of the Component Loadings

Set		Dimension	
		1	2
1	Indirect	.443	.628
	Direct	.774	-.165
2	Initiating Interpersonal Relationships	.269	-.187
	Negative Assertion	.361	-.563
	Disclosing Personal Information	.160	-.031
	Providing Emotional Support	-.330	-.144
	Conflict Management	-.441	-.483

The length of a vector approximates the relative importance of that variable. The angle between the vectors approximates the correlation between the variables. Figure 1 shows two 'directions': the first one from the bottom left hand corner to the top right hand corner and the second one from the top right hand corner to the bottom left hand corner.

The first direction seems to be determined by indirect aggression, conflict management and providing emotional support, suggesting a relative strong but opposite relationship between these domains of aggression and social competence. Since the vectors direct to the highest (mean) value, it indicates that relative high levels of indirect aggression seem to be related with poor conflict management.

The second direction seems to be determined by direct aggression, disclosing personal information and initiating relationships which are clustered together. Negative assertion is somewhat isolated on the graph, but seems to be more related to direct than indirect aggression.

Keeping in mind that a series of bivariate analysis do not fully justify the interdependent relationship between the scales and may overestimate statistical significance, for purposes of consistency with literature, Pearson correlations (2-tailed) were calculated between the levels of aggression and each social competence subscale for the total group and per cultural group. See Table 3 to Table 6 below:

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Aggression Scores and Social Competence Scores for the Total Group (N=729)

Aggression		Social Competence				
		Initiating Relation-ships	Disclosing Personal Informa-tion	Negative Assertion	Providing Emotional Support	Managing Conflict
Direct	Pearson Correlation	.091*	.044	.119**	-.116**	-.175**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	.231	.001	.002	.000
Indirect	Pearson Correlation	.031	.002	-.068	-.071	-.186**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.405	.951	.065	.054	.000

* p < .05

** p < .01

According to Table 3, these results for the total group suggest that direct aggression had significant positive correlations with initiation of relationships (*r* = .091, *p* < .05) and negative assertion (*r* = .119, *p* < .01), and significant negative correlations with providing emotional support (*r* = -.116, *p* < .01) and conflict management (*r* = -.175, *p* < .01). Indirect aggression correlated negatively (*r* = -.186, *p* < .01) with conflict management only.

Table 4

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Aggression Scores and Social Competence Scores for the Black Group (N=172)

Aggression		Social Competence				
		Initiating Relation-ships	Disclosing Personal Informa-tion	Negative Assertion	Providing Emotional Support	Managing Conflict
Direct	Pearson Correlation	-.019	-.019	-.030	-.115	-.078
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.802	.809	.694	.134	.312
Indirect	Pearson Correlation	-.022	-.073	-.120	-.101	-.149
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.770	.342	.115	.186	.050

* p < .05

** p < .01

No significant correlation between direct and indirect aggression and the five domains of social competence was found for the black group.

Table 5

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Aggression Scores and Social
Competence Scores for the Coloured Group (N=238)*

Aggression		Social Competence				
		Initiating Relation-ships	Disclosing Personal Informa-tion	Negative Assertion	Providing Emotional Support	Managing Conflict
Direct	Pearson Correlation	.176**	.134*	.175**	-.077	-.195**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.039	.007	.238	.003
Indirect	Pearson Correlation	.130*	.023	-.057	-.115	-.203**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.046	.720	.384	.076	.002

*   p < .05

** p < .01

Table 5 indicated that for the coloured group, direct aggression had significant positive correlations with initiation of relationships (r = .176, p < .01), disclosure of information (r = .134, p < .01), negative assertion (r = .175, p < .01) and correlated significant negatively with conflict management (r = -.195, p < .01).   Indirect aggression was found to have a significant positive relationship with initiation of relationships (r = .130, p < .05) and to correlate significant negatively with conflict management (r = -.203, p < .01).

Table 6

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Aggression Scores and Social
Competence Scores for the White Group (N=319)

Aggression		Social Competence				
		Initiating Relation-ships	Disclosing Personal Informa-tion	Negative Assertion	Providing Emotional Support	Managing Conflict
Direct	Pearson Correlation	.038	.028	.133*	-.099	-.245**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.503	.623	.018	.076	.000
Indirect	Pearson Correlation	-.020	.008	-.024	-.033	-.200**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.715	.887	.669	.552	.000

* p < .05

** p < .01

Table 6 displays a significant positive correlation between direct aggression and negative assertion ($r = .133$, $p < .05$) and a significant negative correlation between direct aggression and conflict management ($r = -.245$, $p < .01$) for the white group. A significant negative correlation was also found between indirect aggression and conflict management ($r = -.200$, $p < .01$).

In summary, the correlations presented in the tables above are all rather low. It explains, per correlation, a very small portion of the variance of direct and indirect aggression. The association between the variables presented in the canonical analysis were confirmed. The same applies for the uniqueness of the relationship as suggested by the statistical significance. For example, in Table 2, the negative relationship between direct aggression and conflict management is clearly indicated by the high component loading of direct

aggression with the 1st dimension and the considerable but negative component loading of conflict management with the 1st dimension. Likewise, the negative relationship between indirect aggression and conflict management is indicated.

These correlation matrixes support the overall insight gained through the Canonical Analysis. It also highlights that, in general, the correlations between the individual components of the 2 concepts under investigation (aggression and social competence) were low.

7.2 Differences

Taking this information one step further, a multivariate analysis (MANOVA) of gender and cultural group differences with regard to direct and indirect aggression and five domains of social competence (i.e. initiation of relationships with others, negative assertion, disclosing personal information, providing emotional support and interpersonal conflict management) as factors was subsequently conducted. The overall results are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

Multivariate Results of the Factors Gender and Cultural Group and its Interaction

Effect	Value (Pillai Trace)	F	df	Error df	Sig.
Group	.170	9.506	14.000	1436.000	.000
Gender	.107	12.209	7.000	717.000	.000
Group * Gender	.044	2.332	14.000	1436.000	.003

These overall results show that there were significant differences ($p < .01$) between the different cultural groups, between genders and between the interaction of cultural group with gender. This indicates that there was at least one significant difference between two cultural groups when tested for aggression (direct or indirect) or any of the five social competence domains. The same applies for both gender and the interaction between cultural group and gender (in other words where membership to both a specific cultural group and a specific gender applies). The various effects of the different factors are presented in Table 8 as part of the multivariate results.

Table 8

The Multivariate Results Broken Down into the Different Factors

Source	Dependent Variable	df	F	Sig.
Group	Indirect	2	2.707	.067
	Direct	2	18.530	.000
	Initiating	2	3.509	.030
	Neg Assertion	2	4.466	.012
	Disclosing	2	2.898	.056
	Emot Support	2	8.802	.000
	Conflict Man	2	.102	.903
Gender	Indirect	1	4.135	.042
	Direct	1	15.087	.000
	Initiating	1	4.223	.040
	Neg Assertion	1	11.608	.001
	Disclosing	1	2.262	.133
	Emot Support	1	40.367	.000
	Conflict Man	1	7.341	.007
Group * Gender	Indirect	2	2.235	.108
	Direct	2	3.166	.043
	Initiating	2	.171	.843
	Neg Assertion	2	7.837	.000
	Disclosing	2	.497	.609
	Emot Support	2	.344	.709
	Conflict Man	2	1.557	.211

The difference between cultural groups related to indirect aggression showed no significance, but a significant difference ($p < .01$) existed between cultural groups regarding direct aggression.

Table 8 shows that the significant effects found in Table 7 are, for differences between cultural groups, largely caused by direct aggression ($F_{(2,723)}$ = 18.530, $p < .01$), negative assertion ($F_{(2,723)}$ = 4.466, $p < .05$) and providing emotional support ($F_{(2,723)}$ = 8.802, $p < .01$) with a moderate contribution to the main effect by initiating relationships ($F_{(2,723)}$ = 3.509, $p = .03$).

It further shows that the significant effects found for differences between genders are probably caused specifically by differences in direct aggression ($F_{(1, 723)}$ = 15.087, $p < .01$), providing emotional support ($F_{(1,723)}$ = 40.367, $p < .01$), negative assertion ($F_{(1,723)}$ = 11.608, $p < .01$), conflict management ($F_{(1,723)}$ = 7.341, $p < 0.01$) as well as initiating relationships ($F_{(1,723)}$ = 4.223, $p < .05$) and indirect aggression ($F_{(1,723)}$ = 4.135, $p < .05$).

Where both differences for membership to both a group and a gender are considered, it is caused by negative assertion ($F_{(2,723)}$ = 7.837, $p < .01$) and direct aggression ($F_{(2,723)}$ = 3.166, $p < .05$).

Each of the dependent variables were analysed further with regard to specific cultural group and gender. Figures have been used to present the variance analyses visually.

The descriptive statistics for the different groups and genders regarding direct aggression appear in Table 9 with a multiple Bonferroni post hoc comparison in Table 10 and a graphical representation of these results in Figure 2.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Gender, Culture and Direct Aggression

	Group	Gender	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation	n
Direct Aggression	Black	male	1.6088	.65297	91
		female	1.6037	.59968	81
		Total	1.6064	.62662	172
	Coloured	male	1.9951	.87760	102
		female	1.6956	.64794	136
		Total	1.8239	.76774	238
	White	male	1.6462	.59589	106
		female	1.3897	.41989	213
		Total	1.4749	.49943	319
	Total	male	1.7538	.73850	299
		female	1.5267	.55298	430
		Total	1.6199	.64493	729

Table 9 gives the values for the mean, standard deviation and the sample size (n) for direct aggression scores for each cultural group, broken down into genders and the total for each group. Of interest in this table is the fact that the means for direct aggression scores for black males and black females are very close to each other.

Table 10

Multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc Comparisons between Groups for Direct Aggression.

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.(a)	95% Confidence Interval for Difference(a)	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Direct	Black	Coloured	-.239	.062	.000	-.361	-.117
		White	.088	.060	.140	-.029	.206
	Coloured	White	.327	.055	.000	.220	.435

Table 10 shows that there were significant differences in the reported levels of direct aggression between the coloured and white groups ($p < .05$). The coloured group ($M = 1.82$) reported significantly higher levels of direct aggression than the black group ($M = 1.61$) and the white group ($M = 1.47$).

Significant differences were also found between males from the coloured and white groups ($F_{(1,206)} = 11.326$, $p = .001$) and between males from the coloured and black groups ($F_{(1,191)} = 11.801$, $p = .001$) for direct aggression with coloured males displaying significantly more direct aggression than black or white males.

Females from the black and white groups differed significantly ($F_{(1,292)} = 11.867$, $p = .001$) in terms of direct aggression and so did coloured and white females ($F_{(1,292)} = 28.658$, $p < .001$). In both cases white females reported lower levels of direct aggression.
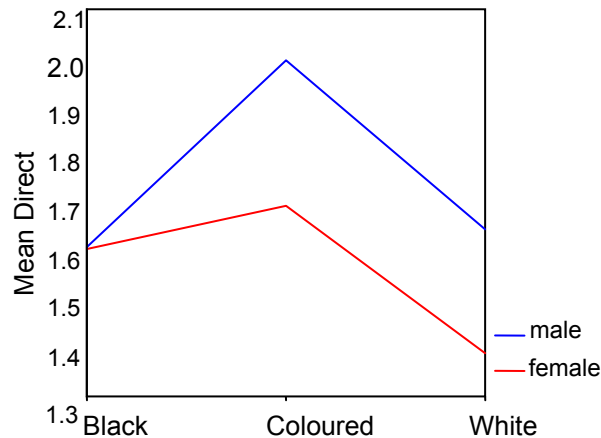
Figure 2. Differences between gender, culture and direct aggression

Table 9 and Figure 2 show that the means for direct aggression do not really differentiate between genders for the black group. The coloured group, however, showed a significant difference between males and females for direct aggression with males reporting significantly higher levels of direct aggression ($F_{(1,236)}$ = 9.177, p = .003). A significant difference was also found between white males and females for direct aggression with males reporting significantly higher levels of direct aggression ($F_{(1,317)}$ = 19.780, p < .001).

The descriptive statistics for the three cultural groups and genders regarding indirect aggression appear in Table 11 with the results of a multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc test in Table 12 and a graphical representation of these results in Figure 3.

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics for Gender, Culture and Indirect Aggression

	Group	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	n
Indirect Aggression	Black	male	1.6725	.59946	91
		female	1.6679	.62386	81
		Total	1.6703	.60928	172
	Coloured	male	1.7118	.67241	102
		female	1.5007	.47819	136
		Total	1.5912	.57783	238
	White	male	1.7396	.51800	106
		female	1.6967	.46484	213
		Total	1.7110	.48276	319
	Total	male	1.7097	.59754	299
		female	1.6293	.50901	430
		Total	1.6623	.54809	729

Table 11 gives the values for the mean, standard deviation and the sample size (n) for indirect aggression scores for each cultural group, broken down into genders and the total for each group. Of interest in this table is the fact that the means for indirect aggression scores for black males and black females are very close to each other.

Table 12

Multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc Comparisons between Groups for Indirect Aggression

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Differ-ence (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.(a)	95% Confidence Interval for Difference(a)	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Indirect	Black	Coloured	.064	.055	.243	-.043	.171
		White	-.048	.053	.363	-.151	.055
	Coloured	White	-.112	.048	.020	-.206	-.017

Table 12 shows that there were significant differences in the reported levels of indirect aggression between the coloured and white groups ($p < .05$). The coloured group ($M = 1.59$) reported significant lower levels of indirect aggression than the white group ($M = 1.71$).
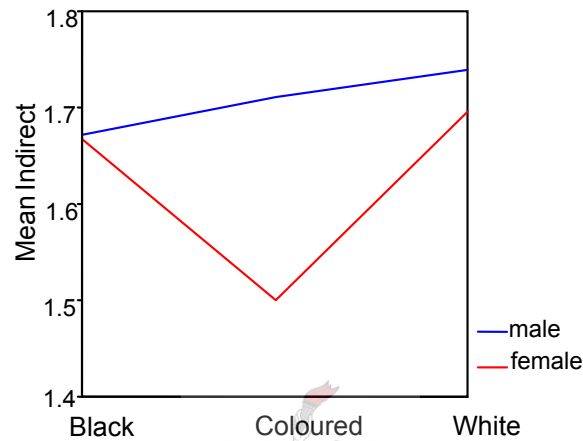
Figure 3. Differences between gender, culture and indirect aggression

Table 11 and Figure 3 show that the means for indirect aggression do not really differentiate between genders for the black group and very little so for genders in the white group. However, the difference between genders in the coloured group suggests a strong effect where females appear to display much lower levels of indirect aggression than males. The difference between coloured males and coloured females was significant ($F_{(1,236)} = 8.004$, $p = .005$).

To summarise, when considering overall differences in aggression among the different cultural groups and genders, the only groups who displayed significant results between their preference for the type of aggression (direct

and indirect) were the coloured group and white females. Both genders in the coloured group seemed to make more use of direct aggression. The reported difference for the males was significant at $F_{(1,202)}$ = 6.600, p = .010 and for females, $F_{(1,270)}$ = 7.962, p = .005. White females, however, had significant higher scores for indirect aggression ($F_{(1, 424)}$ = 10.04, p < .001).

Descriptive statistics and related graphical representations as well as multiple Bonferroni post hoc comparisons for the three different groups and genders with regard to the five domains of social competence (i.e. initiation of relationships with others, negative assertion, disclosing personal information, providing emotional support and interpersonal conflict management) are given in Table 13.

Table 13

Descriptive Statistics for Gender, Culture and Initiating Relationships with Others

	Group	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	n
Initiating	Black	male	3.4313	.63527	91
		female	3.3611	.75104	81
		Total	3.3983	.69103	172
	Coloured	male	3.3346	.79878	102
		female	3.1994	.80066	136
		Total	3.2574	.80097	238
	White	male	3.2818	.74103	106
		female	3.1285	.73017	213
		Total	3.1795	.73619	319
	Total	male	3.3453	.73167	299
		female	3.1948	.76013	430

Table 13 gives the values for the mean, standard deviation and the sample size (n) for the social competence subscale initiating relationships with others

scores for each cultural group, broken down into gender and the total for each group.

Table 14

Multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc Comparisons between Groups for Initiating Relationships with Others

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.(a)	95% Confidence Interval for Difference(a)	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Initiating	Black	Coloured	.129	.075	.086	-.018	.277
		White	.191	.072	.008	.049	.333
	Coloured	White	.062	.066	.349	-.068	.191

Regarding the reported degree to which individuals will initiate relationships, significant differences ($p < .01$) were found between the black and white groups. The black group ($M = 3.40$) reported significant higher levels than the white group ($M = 3.18$).   None of the results were significant between genders.
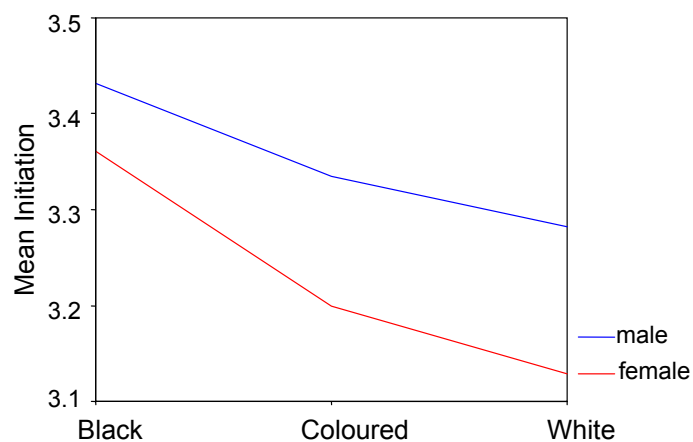
Figure 4. Differences between gender, culture and initiating relationships with others

The descriptive statistics for gender, culture and the social competence subscale, negative assertion are given in Table 15.

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics for Gender, Culture and Negative Assertion

	Group	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	n
Negative Assertion	Black	male	3.1868	.74916	91
		female	3.7299	.80075	81
		Total	3.4426	.81810	172
	Coloured	male	3.3836	.75417	102
		female	3.3676	.85157	136
		Total	3.3745	.80964	238
	White	male	3.2170	.57691	106
		female	3.2835	.71960	213
		Total	3.2614	.67535	319
	Total	male	3.2646	.69789	299
		female	3.3942	.79452	430
		Total	3.3410	.75857	729

The results of a multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc comparison between the different groups for the subscale negative assertion follows below in Table 16 with a graphical representation of these results in Figure 5.

Table 16

Multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc Comparisons between Groups for Negative Assertion.

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Differ-ence (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.(a)	95% Confidence Interval for Difference(a)	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Negative Assertion	Black	Coloured	.083	.075	.270	-.065	.230
		White	.208	.072	.004	.067	.350
	Coloured	White	.125	.066	.058	-.004	.255

With regard to reported levels of negative assertion, significant differences ($p < .01$) were again found between the black and white groups where the black group ($M = 3.44$) reported higher levels than the white group ($M = 3.26$).

The difference between genders for negative assertion was significant for the black group ($F_{(1,170)} = 21.109$, $p < .001$) with females displaying significantly higher levels of negative assertion than males. There were also significant differences between black and coloured females ($F_{(1,215)} = 9.602$, $p = .002$) and between black and white females ($F_{(1,292)} = 21.208$, $p < .001$) with black females displaying significantly higher competence in negative assertion than coloured or white females.
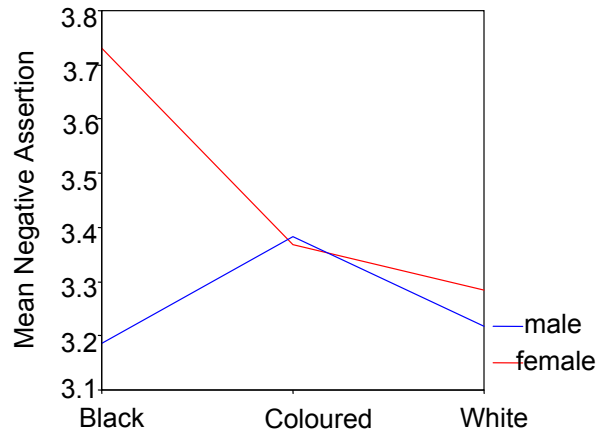
Figure 5. Differences between gender, culture and negative assertion

The descriptive statistics for gender, cultural group and the social competence subscale disclosing personal information is given in Table 17 with a multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc comparison between the groups for this subscale in Table 18 and a relevant graphical representation of these results in Figure 6.

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics for Gender, Culture and Disclosing Personal Information

	Group	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	n
Disclosing personal Information	Black	male	3.1470	.62932	91
		female	3.2747	.62763	81
		Total	3.2071	.62993	172
	Coloured	male	3.0049	.74460	102
		female	3.1167	.80669	136
		Total	3.0688	.78104	238
	White	male	3.1840	.66485	106
		female	3.1937	.70746	213
		Total	3.1904	.69256	319
	Total	male	3.1116	.68513	299
		female	3.1846	.72705	430
		Total	3.1547	.71059	729

Table 18

Multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc Comparisons between Groups for Disclosing Personal Information

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Differ-ence (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.(a)	95% Confidence Interval for Difference(a)	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Disclosing	Black	Coloured	.150	.071	.036	.010	.290
		White	.022	.069	.748	-.113	.157
	Coloured	White	-.128	.063	.042	-.251	-.005

Table 18 shows significant results ($p < .05$) for the degree to which individuals disclose personal information between the black ($M = 3.21$) and coloured ($M = 3.07$) groups as well as the coloured and white ($M = 3.19$) groups. In both cases the coloured groups reported significantly less competence in disclosing personal information. Males and females within each culture did not differ significantly.

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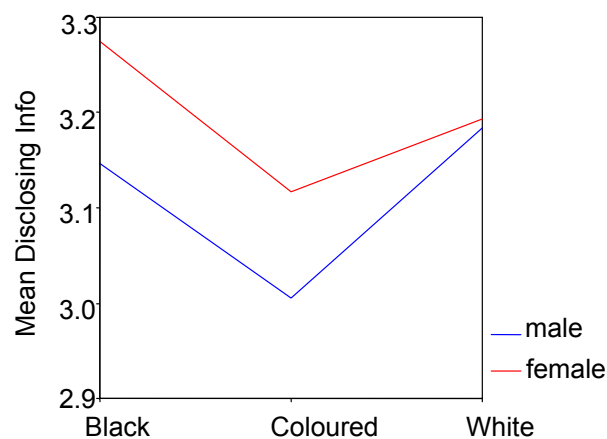
Figure 6. Differences between gender, culture and disclosing personal information

The descriptive statistics for gender, culture and the social competence subscale providing emotional support to others is given in Table 19 with an associated multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc comparison in Table 20 and a relevant graphical representation of these results in Figure 7.

Table 19

Descriptive Statistics for Gender, Culture and Providing Emotional Support

	Group	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	n
Providing Emotional Support	Black	male	3.5398	.71877	91
		female	3.9367	.72163	81
		Total	3.7267	.74499	172
	Coloured	male	3.6507	.80575	102
		female	3.9908	.74265	136
		Total	3.8451	.78695	238
	White	male	3.8573	.67180	106
		female	4.1444	.56751	213
		Total	4.0490	.61812	319
	Total	male	3.6902	.74328	299
		female	4.0567	.66162	430
		Total	3.9064	.71877	729

Table 20

Multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc comparisons between groups for providing emotional support

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.(a)	95% Confidence Interval for Difference(a)	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Providing Emotional Support	Black	Coloured	-.082	.069	.235	-.219	.054
		White	-.263	.067	.000	-.394	-.132
	Coloured	White	-.180	.061	.003	-.300	-.060

According to Table 20 Significant results ($p < .01$) were found for the level of emotional support and advice provided by individuals to others. The white group ($M = 4.05$) scored significantly higher than both the black ($M = 3.73$) and coloured ($M = 3.85$) groups.

Significant differences were also found between genders of all the cultural groups: The black group ($F_{(1,317)} = 15.983$, $p < .001$), the coloured group ($F_{(1,236)} = 11.361$, $p = .001$) and the white group ($F_{(1,236)} = 11.361$, $p = .001$) displayed very large differences between genders with females scoring significantly higher than males.

Females from the white and black groups differed significantly ($F_{(1,292)} = 6.72$, $p = .01$) as did white and coloured females ($F_{(1,347)} = 4.76$, $p = .03$) with white females scoring significantly higher than their black and coloured counterparts.
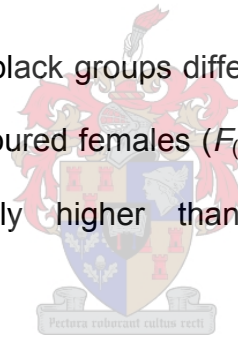
Large significant differences were also found between males from the black and white groups ($F_{(1,195)} = 10.25$, $p = .002$) with smaller differences, although still significant, between white and coloured males ($F_{(1,206)} = 4.045$, $p = .046$) with white males scoring significantly higher than black and coloured males.
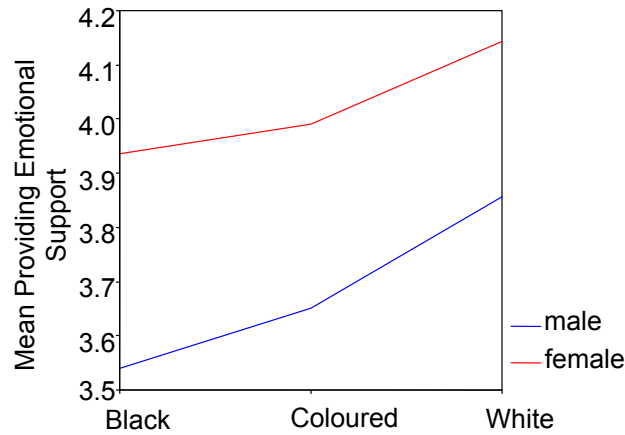
Figure 7. Differences between gender, culture and providing emotional support to others

The descriptive statistics for gender, culture and the social competence subscale interpersonal conflict management is given in Table 21 with an associated multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc comparison in Table 22 and a relevant graphical representation of these results in Figure 8.

Table 21

Descriptive Statistics for Gender, Culture and Interpersonal Conflict Management

|	Group	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	n
Conflict Manage-ment	Black	male	3.2747	.67578	91
		female	3.5340	.69344	81
		Total	3.3968	.69438	172
	Coloured	male	3.3725	.65248	102
		female	3.4789	.68660	136
		Total	3.4333	.67286	238
	White	male	3.4116	.57346	106
		female	3.4525	.60317	213
		Total	3.4389	.59287	319
	Total	male	3.3566	.63348	299
		female	3.4762	.64709	430
		Total	3.4271	.64380	729

Table 22

Multiple Bonferroni Post Hoc Comparisons between Groups for Conflict Management.

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.(a)	95% Confidence Interval for Difference(a)	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Conflict Management	Black	Coloured	-.021	.065	.741	-.148	.105
		White	-.028	.062	.656	-.150	.094
	Coloured	White	-.006	.057	.912	-.118	.105

No significant differences were found for managing interpersonal conflict among the groups.

Black males differed significantly from black females with females reporting significantly higher levels of conflict management capability ($F_{(1,170)}$ = 6.153, p = .014). Differences between genders in the other cultural groups were not significant.
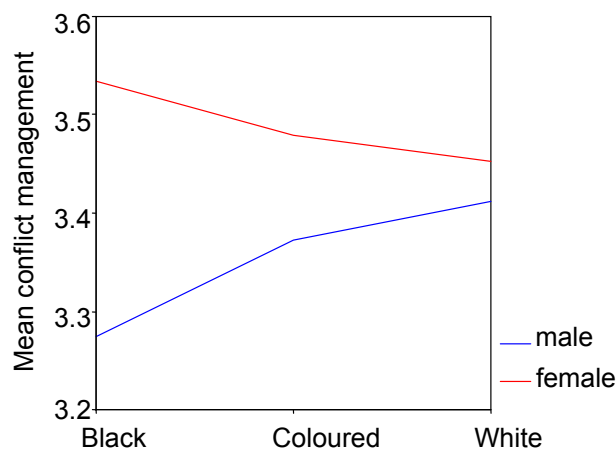
Figure 8. Differences between gender, culture and interpersonal conflict management

8   DISCUSSION

This aim of the present study was to investigate the causal relationship between the levels of direct and indirect aggression in individuals and their social competence, specifically the ability to initiate relationships, portray negative assertion, disclose personal information, provide emotional support and advice, and to manage social conflict. It was an exploratory study as relatively little research has been done in this regard in South Africa. As a result of this it was not easy to find acceptable explanations for some of the results.

8.1   Correlations between Aggression and Social Competence for the Total Group

The hypothesised relationship between levels of direct and indirect aggression and the levels of social competence within the total group was found, even though it is a weak relationship. However, when further canonical analyses were performed for the overall group, it was established that stronger relationships exist between some of the subscales.

8.1.1 Direct Aggression and Social Competence

Regarding direct aggression, an interesting phenomenon is observed: High scores in direct aggression are significant positively associated with initiating relationships and negative assertion, but there are significant negative correlations between this form of aggression and providing emotional support (empathy) and interpersonal conflict management (see Table 3). This might

indicate that direct aggression is associated with possessing a number of desirable social skills. It could be argued, that both negative assertion and initiating relationships are traits often associated with socially less inhibited or more extroverted people, who, supported by the findings of Richardson and Green (2003), are more likely to engage in direct aggression. The negative relationship with providing emotional support stems from the definition of direct aggression which is aimed at harming other people (Björkqvist et al., 1992b) and definitely excludes any form of emotional support to or empathy with others. It is in part supported by research findings of Björkqvist et al. (2000) who reported significant negative partial correlations between empathy and respectively verbal and physical aggression which are components of direct aggression. Wolf et al. (1986) have also identified lower levels of social competence – specifically empathy – in children who witnessed domestic violence. Other researchers who found that empathy mitigates aggression include Burleson (2003), Ford (1982) and Richardson et al. (1994). Direct aggression's opposite relationship with interpersonal conflict management supports the results of South African studies (Roper, 2002). It is nonetheless surprising, as both concepts involve face-to-face confrontation of others. Roper's (2002) finding in this regard was that conflict management skills per se are not very effective because other factors (for example gang activity, victimisation, carrying of weapons) impact on people's ability to apply these skills. Rens (1991) have also found in a South African study that intervention programs that involve social competence training increased prosocial behaviour (specifically conflict management competence) but

did not reduce aggression. Another possible explanation for the negative relationship between direct aggression and appropriate conflict management is that a social competent person who can successfully solve interpersonal conflict will probably not need to resort to direct aggression, but will use more socially acceptable techniques.

Richardson et al. (1998), using the same questionnaires, reported considerably different results than those obtained in the present study. For adolescents they found no significant correlations between direct aggression and any of the social competence components. For young adults they reported negative but significant correlations with conflict management, disclosure of personal information, empathy and assertiveness. One possible reason why their results and those of the present study differ so much could be because the age of the participants in the present study overlaps with those of their study (adolescents and young adults). The results of the present study are more closely comparable with their results for young adults, as both groups were university students. Furthermore, the participants in the present study represent different cultures in a society known to be very violent, whilst their participants were American adolescents and students from less violent communities. The cultural backgrounds and societies of the participants in the two studies differ significantly and different results could therefore be expected as culture is a strong factor influencing behaviour.

8.1.2 Indirect Aggression and Social Competence

There seems to be a fairly strong significant but negative correlation between indirect aggression and conflict management (see Table 3). For the total group, this suggests that high levels of indirect aggression are actually associated with a *lack* of certain social skills, in particular conflict management. This supports the findings of Richardson and Green (2003) who have also found that indirect aggression does not correlate with well developed social skills: a counter intuitive finding to the popular assumption (supported strongly by research done by Björkqvist et al. (1992a, b)) that holds that indirect aggression involves a carefully planned strategy that requires insight and forethought. Richardson and Green's study seems to suggest that indirect aggression may actually be associated with a lack of some social skills such as empathy, negative assertion and conflict management. The negative relationship that was found between indirect aggression and conflict management is of great interest. It could be argued that conflict management often involves a face-to-face approach to discuss disagreements between people and that this already contradicts the nature and definition of indirect aggression (Lagerspetz et al., 1988) which tends to exclude any form of direct confrontation with the other party.

In conclusion, it seems as if the relationship between individual domains of social skills and aggression is not as straightforward as expected.

8.2 Correlations between Aggression and Social Competence within each Cultural Group

A relationship between levels of direct and indirect aggression and the levels of social competence within each of the cultural groups participating in the study was hypothesised. Significant results were found within the groups. These results do not fully reflect the more significant results obtained for the total group. This could be due to the oversimplification of applying a bivariate analysis to the data, thus treating each component of both aggression and social competence as if it is independent from the other components in each set. For example, people who are competent in initiating relationships with other people are probably more likely to develop emotional support or conflict management competence and even other variables, such as general intelligence and anxiety may also have an influence across these components (Buhrmester et al., 1988). This is consistent with Roper's (2002) conclusion in a South African study that broader intervention programmes should be considered as those focusing on enhancing single social skills were not successful. More factors, like the gender of the other party or the context of the situations could also play a role in the results obtained. It should furthermore be noted that the correlations found within groups in this study, even though significant, were not strong if the Pearson *r*-values are considered.

For the black group, no significant correlation between aggression and social competence was found (see Table 4). It could mean that, especially among

black people, a more complex relationship exists between direct or indirect aggression respectively and the domains of social competence. Consistent with Roper's (2002) arguments, this relationship probably involves combinations of the components of social competence as opposed to simple and independent relationships with the individual domains. Blacks subscribe to a culture which differs in many aspects from the Western culture of the coloured and white people. It is possible that ubuntu creates a set of standard norms in the black culture that make their social interaction more rule-based than interactions in the Western culture, for example the relationship building and maintenance and the accompanying social skills. This could impact on a possible relationship between social competence and aggression. Even though the black participants in this study are probably transitional persons, they may easily revert temporarily back to a more traditional mindset, especially in stressful periods (Erasmus, 2003; Peltzer, 1995) and ubuntu is therefore still relevant to them and it could maybe explain why a clear relationship between aggression and social competence was not found.

In the coloured group, results suggest that *both* direct and indirect aggression seem to be significant positively associated with initiating relationships and correlate significant negatively with managing conflict (see Table 5). Direct aggression also seems to correlate significant positively with disclosure of information and negative assertion. These results are consistent with the findings of Richardson and Green (2003) who found that direct aggression seems to be

positively associated with negative assertion. Initiation of relationships, negative assertion and disclosure of personal information refer to an individual's ability to communicate or express oneself openly and directly to others which might be associated with personality traits of extroverts who were found to revert more easily to direct aggression (Richardson and Geen, 2003). Coloured people are very exposed to aggression and the positive correlations with initiating relationships and disclosure of personal information could suggest that this group has a need to be more involved with others through initiating relationships and sharing personal information with others. They may also be more assertive to protect and defend themselves in such violent environments. To explain the positive correlation between indirect aggression and initiation of relationships, it could be argued that indirect aggression often involves spreading rumours about a victim and bringing him or her into disrepute within a larger social circle. Individuals who are competent in initiating relationships with other people will probably also be competent in manipulating their social networks to discredit the victim. This explanation supports the research results of Björkqvist et al. (1992a, b) that socially competent individuals use their networks to bring their victims into disrepute. The negative correlation found for both direct and indirect aggression regarding conflict management, like in the case of the total group can be explained as follows: It is possible that other factors (often creating fear) impact on an individual's ability to apply conflict management (Roper, 2002) skills effectively. Because of the confrontational nature of conflict management, which is in direct contrast to the definition of indirect aggression (Lagerspetz et al.,

1988) which tends to exclude a face-to-face approach with opponents, it is not surprising that there is a significant negative correlation with indirect aggression. Furthermore, an individual with sufficient and appropriate conflict management skills will probably not revert to either direct or indirect aggression to solve interpersonal conflict, but will make use of socially acceptable techniques.

The coloured group displayed more instances (six instances) of significant correlations (either positive or negative) between levels of aggression and individual domains of social competence than the black (no instances) and the white (three instances) groups. This means that there is a more pronounced relationship between aggression and social competence in general in this group than in the other groups. The positive correlations with some of the subscales (specifically initiating relationships, disclosing personal information and negative assertion that were found for direct aggression and the positive correlation with initiating relationships that was found for indirect aggression) actually implicate that the possession of desirable social skills is associated with an increase in aggression. It may be explained by the fact that they live in more extreme violent communities than their black and white counterparts where children and adolescents are thus more exposed to aggression where other factors, creating fear, inhibit their ability to apply those skills successfully to reduce aggression (Roper, 2002).

The white participants in the present study have been least exposed to violence. For this group a significant positive correlation was found between direct aggression and negative assertion and negative correlations were found for both direct and indirect aggression regarding conflict management. This is consistent with findings for the total group. The positive correlation between direct aggression and negative assertion may be because assertiveness is a personality trait associated with extroverts who tend to employ direct aggression strategies (Richardson & Green, 2003). This would imply that Whites in the present study are largely extroverts. The negative correlation found for both direct and indirect aggression regarding conflict management can be explained as follows: It is possible that other factors (often creating fear) impact on an individual's ability to apply conflict management (Roper, 2002) skills effectively. With the current political situation in the country, white people (especially males) are affected by the affirmative action policy which excludes them from a large number of job opportunities. The Whites who participated in this study are students and they may experience fear and concern over future job opportunities for them. White people are also living in fear of becoming victims of crime (as is evident from the obsessive security measures they resort to in their homes and communities in general). Also, because of the confrontational nature of conflict management, it conflicts with the nature of indirect aggression (Lagerspetz et al., 1988). Furthermore, an individual who can appropriately manage interpersonal conflict will most likely not use either direct or indirect aggression.

8.3 Gender differences in Direct and Indirect Aggression within each Cultural Group

One of the hypotheses was that there would be significant gender differences in direct and indirect aggression within the groups as literature suggests that gender and gender socialisation differences have an impact on behaviour. Even though the results of international studies seem to contradict each other in this regard, the assumption that gender differences are significant to direct or indirect types of aggression was reached after considering research that concluded that males tend to make more use of direct aggression whilst females rely more on indirect aggression (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Bushman & Anderson, 1998; Fry, 1988; Graham, 2001; Lagerspetz et al., 1988; Vogel, 2002). Consistent with the hypothesis in the present study, Theron et al. (2001) have also concluded, in a study that involved South African students, that females will engage more often in indirect than direct aggression.
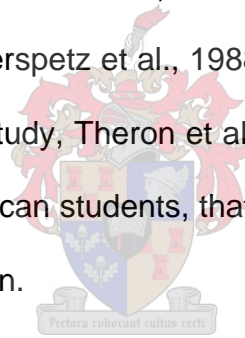
The differences in both direct and indirect aggression in the black group were not linked to gender. This is consistent with the findings in a local study done by Möller (2001) which has also found no significant differences between genders in a similar group of black students as those who participated in the present study. The results are also supported by Björkqvist et al. (1994) who indicated that gender differences in aggression among children seem to disappear among adults. The reason why there were no significant difference in reported aggression for black people could be explained in terms of the emancipation of

black women in the current political and economic structures. Black women suffered most under Apartheid legislation (Mtintso, 2001) and enjoy significant empowerment through employment and gender equity. Gaining economic and social independence from men challenges not only women's positions within patriarchal systems, but also men's expectations about the role of women. This must have a severe impact on black females' behaviour and levels of aggression and could be the reason why black females are just as aggressive as black men.

The present study suggests that females in the coloured group display significantly lower levels of *both* direct and indirect aggression than their male counterparts. This is inconsistent with the findings of a South African study by Möller (2001) which reported no significant differences between genders in a similar group of coloured students as those who participated in the present study. The still existing general strong patriarchal system and gender socialisation in the coloured community which expects females to be more passive and submissive to men and girls are not valued as highly as boys (Abrahams et al., 2004; De la Rey, 1992; Jewkes, 2001; Jewkes et al., 2002; Pietersen, 2002; Stevens et al., 2003) could play a role and should be considered when attempting to explain the gender differences for coloured people found in the present study. Although there is in general a strong patriarchal system in South Africa that affects all the cultural groups in this study, it has also been noted that domestic violence caused by, among other factors, substance abuse is common in disadvantaged coloured communities (Jewkes et al., 2002; Van der Hoven, 2001). It could

mean that because of the strong patriarchal system maintained in this group females are even more passive and submissive to males fearing domestic or other violence against them. This may result in coloured females displaying less direct and indirect aggression than the males.

It is essential to understand that coloured females living in post-Apartheid disadvantaged communities are exposed to violence and crime in their poverty-stricken communities. While gangs and gangsterism are not the only way in which violence is experienced in these communities, their activities are responsible for a large amount of community violence (Jensen, 2004; Jewkes, 2001; Pietersen, 2002; Steenkamp, 2004). These gangs consist mostly of young coloured males who are most often the perpetrators of acts of violence. The coloured females are very often the witnesses or victims of violent acts of aggression where male gang members see women as their property and gang raping is very common (Artz & Kunisaki, 2003; Jewkes et al., 2002; Pietersen, 2002). Therefore, it seems as if coloured females may be less aggressive than males.

According to Richardson and Green's findings (2003) low levels of aggression could imply that individuals lack certain social skills, specifically assertion and conflict management. The results obtained in the present study for the coloured females, however, do not fully support this finding as there were no significant

differences between genders in the coloured group in those domains (assertion and conflict management) of social competence.

In the white group, females displayed significantly lower direct aggression than the males. This is inconsistent with the results of a South African study by Möller (2001) where no significant differences were found between genders in a similar group of white students than those who participated in the present study. Very little information is known about the white participants of Möller's study, making it difficult to explain the reasons for this discrepancy. For the present study, the effect of the strong system of patriarchy in South Africa as well as the fairly prominent customs and traditions in especially the Afrikaans family life (a significant part of the white group of participants were Afrikaans speaking) might explain why white women in this study reported significantly less engagement in direct aggression than white males. It is well-known that Afrikaans people are traditionally very religious and conservative and that patriarchy is a very prominent element of their culture and history. Patriarchy essentially views women as inferior to men. They are often perceived as their possessions, not quite full adults and in need of being led and controlled and to serve men (Cloete, 1992). Through their gender socialisation, males are expected to engage more in activities which exert their dominance and portray their authority, while females are expected to be passive and submissive. In fact, in societies with such a strong patriarchal nature, males are frequently rewarded for aggression as they grow up which leads to men viewing aggression as an appropriate means to

manage conflict (Berkowitz, 1993). It is also, in general, to a certain degree socially unacceptable for females to display direct aggression (Richardson & Green, 1999). This already suggests a bias for females in general to engage in less direct aggression. Erasmus (2003) refers to the general anthropological assumption that people, when confronted with social-cultural transformation, tend to focus more strongly on customs and traditions of the past, as it provides them with a sense of security. With the current ongoing political changes in South Africa, this could be true of white people who have given up their position of authority and who may feel that their culture, identity and language are under threat. White South Africans may therefore fall back on the more traditional roles of aggressive and authoritarian males and passive and submissive females. It may therefore serve to explain why white females in this study have reported less engagement in direct aggression than males.
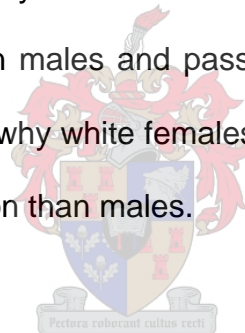
8.4 Cross-cultural Differences in Direct and Indirect Aggression among Males

It was hypothesised in this study that cross-cultural differences in direct and indirect aggression exist among males. Support for this result could only be found for reported levels of direct aggression. Coloured males reported significantly more frequent engagement into direct aggression than their black and white counterparts (see Figure 2).

In an international study Österman et al. (1998) have also found cultural differences in aggression and stated that it is to be expected as a certain type of behaviour that is accepted in one culture may be considered aggressive or hostile in another.

It is interesting to note that both black and white males respectively reported a higher overall mean for indirect aggression than for direct aggression even though these results are not significant (see Figure 3). This is against the expected trends of higher bias for direct aggression in males, as is commonly believed and was also found by researchers (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Bushman & Anderson, 1998; Fry, 1988; Graham, 2001; Lagerspetz et al., 1988; Vogel, 2002).

Disadvantaged coloured communities are exposed to severe violence and crime with an inability on government's side to stabilise the situation (Jensen, 2004; Thomson, 2004). It is possible that some of the coloured participants from these communities exposed to high levels of violence in the present study have been exposed to gangsterism. Palmer (2004) reports that 60% of the violent attacks reported on the Cape Flats in 1998 were gang-related. She also states that one of the most frightening consequences of being constantly exposed to violence is a reduced sensitivity that allows people to accept violence and aggression as an inevitable and entrenched part of their daily lives. This finding is supported by other South African studies (Matthews et al., 1999; Artz & Kunisaki, 2003).

According to Artz and Kunisaki (2003), gang members are not only desensitised but even excited by acts of violence. They are trained to fight and have to commit acts of violence as part of the gang's initiation practices to show that they are loyal to the establishment and to prove their masculinity. They are also taught that human life and dignity is dispensable because of a bigger cause and that women can be seen as their property or part of the loot.

It is definitely not only community violence that affects male aggression. Domestic violence against women is rife in the poverty stricken disadvantaged coloured communities (Van der Hoven, 2001). Boys witness their father's violence against their mothers. This exposure not only desensitises them further for aggression and violence, but it also affects their gender socialisation and their normative beliefs about aggression (Jewkes et al., 2002). Against this backdrop, it is maybe not totally unexpected that coloured males scored significantly higher than any other group regarding direct aggression. These results can also be explained in terms of Bandura's (1973) Social Learning Theory in conjunction with Huesmann's (1994) version of the Social Information Processing Theory that would imply that coloured males have not only learned behaviour (in this case aggression) from influential role models in their violent communities, but that their normative beliefs about violence have subsequently become favourable towards aggression. As a result of this domestic violence against females in disadvantaged coloured communities is common (Jewkes et al., 2002) and

community and domestic violence are being maintained from one generation to another.

8.5 Cross-cultural Differences in Direct and Indirect Aggression among Females

It was hypothesised that cross-cultural differences in direct and indirect aggression exist among the three cultural groups of females who participated in the present study.

In support of the hypothesis, reported levels of direct aggression differed significantly among the groups with white females reporting significantly lower levels of direct aggression than the coloured and black women (see Figure 2). Furthermore, significant differences in reported levels of indirect aggression were also reported with coloured women showing highly significant lower levels of indirect aggression than their black and white counterparts (see Figure 3). It is clear from these results that black females display no specific preference for direct or indirect aggression, whereas white females would engage more in indirect aggression and coloured females in direct aggression.

Being students and raised in South Africa, the context of the female participants in this study may be of great importance when explaining why white females in the present study reported significantly lower levels of direct aggression than the females in the other groups. All these women were subjected to a patriarchal society that is characteristic of the South African context. This would limit their

expectations about their education. Black and coloured females have, in addition to patriarchy, also been subjected to other factors that place pressure on the female role in their cultures. Mtintso's (2001) referral of the "triple oppression" applies here, making black and coloured women's oppression under patriarchy and apartheid far worse than that of the white females. It also means that they had many more obstacles to overcome in order to enrol as students at a university – this will have an impact on their levels of assertion. It could further be argued that due to the political history of South Africa, white females have been much more exposed to western customs and trends, including an emphasis on academic education. White South Africans have traditionally been more affluent than their counterparts, making university attendance much more accessible to them. The white female participants in this study in all probability did not have to overcome as many obstacles to enrol as students as the black and coloured females. It can therefore be argued that this specific group of black and coloured female participants in the present study pertain to be far more emancipated and have in all probability challenged more patriarchal and associated limitations than other more traditional groups of black and coloured females. They are therefore most likely more assertive and less submissive than their cultural counterparts who have lower levels of education. These seem to be personality traits possessed by less inhibited people who make more use of direct aggression than others (Richardson & Green, 2003). This may explain why black and coloured females in this study reported significantly higher direct aggression than white females.

Furthermore, due to the opportunities created for women in the post-apartheid era and the subsequent empowerment of females, it could also be argued that the black and coloured female participants, who have suffered more under Apartheid have subsequently become more assertive and may make more use of direct aggression than white females.

Another reason why white females seem to employ significantly less direct aggression than the females in the other groups may be found in their social environments. They have been far less exposed to acts of direct aggression than black and coloured female participants whose lives have been much more dramatically affected by the Struggle which used violence to combat violence in the apartheid era – the participants were approximately 13 years old in 1994 with the fall of apartheid. Black women in traditional homelands had to take responsibility for their families during the apartheid years while the males were working in mines and on farms elsewhere. As a result, these women had to become assertive to survive (Hirschmann, 1998; Motsemme, 2003) and may subsequently have displayed more direct aggression. It is possible that, in terms of Bandura's (1973) Social Learning Theory, they have served as role models for their daughters in this regard, passing this assertiveness on from one generation to another. The coloured females are also exposed to a large degree to community and domestic violence (Jewkes, 2001; Legget, 2004; Moller, 2001; Pietersen, 2002; Thomson, as cited in Legget, 2004). It can therefore be argued

that the black and coloured females could have been desensitised for direct aggression and that it has become a more accepted form of aggressive behaviour for them when compared with white females in this study. In terms of Bandura's (1973) Social Learning Theory combined with Huesmann's (1994) Social Information Processing Theory, black and coloured females in this study are more at risk of observing and thus learning violent behaviour than their white counterparts. As a result, they might be desensitised for violence and their normative beliefs about it become more favourable, making direct aggression more desirable and acceptable for black and coloured females.

To explain why coloured females reported significantly less engagement in indirect aggression than their black and white counterparts requires an understanding of the violence in their communities. As mentioned, domestic violence is a very prevalent form of aggression in disadvantaged coloured communities, very often as a result of substance abuse (Jewkes, 2001; Jewkes et al., 2002; Van der Hoven, 2001). Gang violence in their communities is often directed at females who are seen as part of the loot or the property of gang members (Van Wyk, 2001). In these situations they also have to defend themselves physically (direct aggression) against their perpetrators. Coloured females are therefore probably more exposed to direct aggression than their black and white counterparts, making this form of aggression most likely more familiar to them than indirect aggression.

8.6   Gender Differences in Social Competence within Each Cultural Group

According to the hypothesis, gender differences were expected in social competence levels within the different cultural groups.   In support of this hypothesis, significant gender differences were found in the black group for negative assertion and interpersonal conflict management and within all three cultural groups for providing emotional support (see Figures 4 to 8).

The black group is the only cultural group who displayed significant gender differences in all the domains of social competence other than initiating relationships and providing emotional support. A highly significant difference was reported for negative assertion with black females scoring significantly higher than black males (see Figure 5). Black females also reported significantly better conflict management competence (see Figure 8).   It seems as if black females are not as inhibited as their male counterparts when it comes to expressing their negative feelings and confronting other people. This is somewhat surprising when one considers the patriarchal nature in the political, social and family structures in this country where one could maybe expect females to be more inhibited and less confrontational.

To explain why black and coloured females in the present study showed significant higher levels of direct aggression compared with white females it should be considered that the specific group of black and coloured females participating in this study is an exceptional group because of the barriers they

most likely had to overcome. Therefore, these results could possibly not be applied to the overall group of black and coloured women in South Africa. Furthermore, the end of Apartheid encouraged the recognition of equal rights for women and the promotion of social justice. Legislation was put in place to ensure that opportunities were created for the training and employment of women (Skills Development Act, 97 of 1998 and Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998). It may be that black and coloured women have embraced these opportunities to become emancipated and gain equal status with males even more than the white group. Although many black people in South Africa could be considered transitional people, it could be argued that the females are experiencing a stronger and more significant transition from the traditional to the western cultures. This is because their roles in the traditional system, which are being replaced by the western system, were far more deprived and restricted than their male counterparts' positions. A traditional person's social status is very dependent upon the group and its values, norms and ideals while the transitional person is more removed from the group in that sense and has undergone a process of individuation and subsequently emancipation with a stronger focus on achievement and competition (Peltzer, 1995). Through this process of emancipation black women may challenge patriarchal systems and become less inhibited and more assertive which explain the gender differences found with regard to negative assertion and interpersonal conflict management in a community where black women are not encouraged to think independently and

those who do so are seen to be treading on male territory (Motsemme, 2003; Ngconco, 1993).

It seems as if females across all cultural groups tend to support others emotionally significantly better than males do. This is consistent with research by Burleson (2003) and Ford (1982) who found that both men and women value emotional support equally high in relationships, but that women tend to produce such behaviour more often than men. He also cites research that concluded that both men and women are more likely to seek such emotional support from women than from men. It has also been found that empathy correlates negatively with aggression (Björkqvist et al., 2000; Farrington, 2002). As females in the present study reported significantly less direct (for coloured and white participants) and indirect (for coloured participants) aggression than their male counterparts it could further explain the significantly more empathy found for females.

Although it was only the black group who reported significant differences between genders regarding interpersonal conflict management, it is interesting to note that overall, across all three cultural groups participating in this study, females reported more competence in this area. This supports the findings of Österman et al. (1997) who have also found a female advantage in conflict resolution skills. They ascribed this to a higher verbal intelligence in females. Another explanation may be found in the effect/danger ratio according to which

an individual will weigh the possible effects of aggression up against the danger of different conflict strategies and choose an optimal ratio. Accordingly, because females tend to be physically weaker than men, they could have learned from experience that direct aggression is not so viable in their case and opt for more constructive conflict resolution strategies or indirect aggression (Österman et al, 1997).

8.7 Cross-Cultural Differences in Social Competence Levels

The last hypothesis was that there would be differences in levels of social competence across the cultural groups. This was formulated firstly because of the expected difference in levels of aggression across the cultural groups and if, (according to the first hypotheses) a relationship exists between levels of aggression and social competence, then differences in levels of aggression across groups may imply differences in social competence.

In support of this hypothesis, significant cross-cultural differences were reported in four of the five domains of social competence. Regarding the reported degree to which individuals will initiate relationships, the black group reported significant higher levels of competence than the white group (see Figure 4). Reported levels of negative assertion (asserting displeasure with others) yielded significant differences between the black and white groups with the black group reporting a higher level of competence than the white group (see Figure 5). Significant results were also found for the levels to which individuals disclose personal

information to others between the black and white groups respectively with the coloured group. The coloured group reported lower levels of competence than the two other groups (see Figure 6). It was also found that there are differences in the level of emotional support and advice provided by individuals to others. The white group scored significantly higher than both the other cultural groups (see Figure 7). However, no significant differences were found for managing interpersonal conflict among the groups (see Figure 8).

The black group reported significant higher levels of competence than the white group regarding initiating relationships. This can probably be explained by the culture of ubuntu which is deeply embedded in the black society in South Africa. Ubuntu involves the development and maintenance of mutually affirming and enhancing relationships within the community (Nussbaum, 2003) and it conflicts with individualism and capitalism, which are key characteristics of the western society to which the white group subscribes. Black people in South Africa can be considered as so-called transitional people as they are in the process of making a transition from being traditional persons to adopting the western culture. However, according to Peltzer (1995) they are still psychologically rooted in traditional culture during this transitional phase. Accordingly, their process of socialisation still depends significantly more on people than it does in the western culture where a person is socialised more by objects in the environment. It can thus be argued that black people may be more skilled in reaching out and
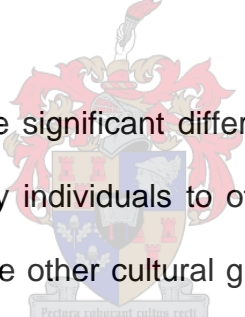
forming relationships with others, than coloured or white people (who are closer to the western culture (Du Pré, 1997)), as it is inherently part of their culture.

With regard to reported levels of negative assertion, significant differences were again found between the black and white groups. The black group reported a higher level of assertion than the white participants. It seems as if this level of negative assertion reported by the black group is strongly influenced by the very high score of the females in this group. Black males, however, have reported the lowest level of all the groups, also when gender is taken into account. As argued earlier, black female participants in this study could be considered an exceptional and not entirely representative group as they have most probably challenged far more obstacles than any of the other participating groups to enrol as students. They can also be seen as transitional persons who are in the processes of making the transition from traditional to western culture, which bring about even more challenges to cultural restraints and subsequent emancipation for the females (Peltzer, 1995). Combined with opportunities created by post-apartheid legislation to improve women's economic and social positions in life, this may have resulted in a more assertive approach by black females. Also, as discussed earlier, traditional black females in the apartheid era were responsible for their families, while their husbands were working elsewhere as migrant labourers (Ramphele, 1986). In order to survive, these women probably had to become more assertive. The Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1973) predicts that these women were role models for their daughters and passed their skills on

from one generation to another. It is therefore not surprising that black female participants have reported such high levels of assertion. It should be noted that White people reported the lowest level of asserting displeasure with others. It may be a remnant culture of the Struggle where the black and coloured groups were forced to actively and continuously voice their dissatisfaction with their situation in order to bring about change.

Significant results for the levels to which individuals disclose personal information to others were found between the black and white groups respectively with the coloured group. The coloured group reported lower levels of competence than the two other groups. With little existing research done in this regard to fall back on, it is very difficult to explain. A possible explanation could be that, because of the domestic and community violence that seems to be prevalent in the disadvantaged coloured communities, individuals may not disclose personal information about themselves easily to others as part of their defence mechanisms and self-protection measures. Fathers are often absent due to teenage pregnancies, resulting in many single parent households (Nel, 2004; Van Wyk, 2001). These single-parent mothers have to work to get an income for their households, and they often have to travel long distances to the places they work at. During the days, their children are therefore not appropriately supervised and they end up spending a lot of time on the streets. (It must be noted that this only affects a part of the coloured community and this discussion can not be generalised to include the whole community and probably excludes

the majority of coloured participants in the present study). In addition to this, the crowded housing situation in such disadvantaged communities which resulted from forced relocation during the Apartheid era, young people also have little room at home and they also take to the streets (Legget, 2004). For an individual to disclose personal information about him/herself a safe and nurturing environment, typical of a close and stable family setting would be very conducive and ideal. However, with some of the coloured youth spending a significant part of their time on the streets where they are exposed to negative influences, it could be argued that they may lack such a safe environment and consequently may not have so much opportunity to divulge personal information to others.

It was also found that there are significant differences in the level of emotional support and advice provided by individuals to others. The white group scored significantly higher than both the other cultural groups. This could be explained by the findings of Sarkisian and Gerstel (2004) who found that black people are more involved in practical support (for example help with transportation, household work, and child care), whilst Whites report greater involvement in emotional support. Burleson (2003) also found that people from collectivist cultures (comparable with the black group) tend to be more focussed on problem-solving when faced with another person's problem, because the focus on an individual's emotional state and preoccupation with an individual's wants and needs are considered inappropriate and may disrupt the harmony of the group. In the black culture people are thus less comfortable dealing with an

individual's emotional needs. On the other hand, in individualist cultures (comparable with the white group in this study) people's emotional states are often viewed as something to be analysed and examined and explicitly explored. Burleson (2003) suggests that solidarity is less likely to be assumed than in the collectivistic cultures and should thus be fabricated through empathy, interest and care for others.

8.8   Limitations of the Study

A more in-depth analysis of the concepts measured as well as the instruments used to do that may explain why the relationships found were not stronger and whether the results obtained reflect the object of this research.

Both aggression and social competence were viewed in a very simplistic way in this study and no attention was given to other important factors like the target of aggression or social interaction, the social and circumstantial backdrop of such behaviour or the justification for it. Burbank (1994) argues that it might be impossible to create a single cross-culturally valid measure of aggression and that great care should be taken before labelling many acts as aggressive. She also feels that victims, observers, and aggressors may all see an "aggressive act" in different ways as it is subjectively determined and motivated by factors like emotions, perceptions and needs.

The mere fact that there are various non-identical instruments available claiming to measure aggression is already an indication that a person's aggression levels is not comprehensively measured, but that what is found through such measurement only indicates the presence of one or more such levels of aggression in an individual.

The instrument used in the current study to measure levels of aggression was the RCRQ (Richardson Conflict Response Questionnaire) which has a 5-point Likert-type scale and 28 questions describing various acts of aggression. The respondent has to indicate how frequently he or she engaged in these aggressive acts when someone angered him or her in the past month. It therefore measures active participation in aggression and gives no indication of aggression that did not necessarily lead to an act of aggression. Furthermore, a 5-point scale can be problematic, as it allows individuals to refrain from making a specific decision about the frequency of their behaviour. It leaves them the option to choose fairly neutral answers (central tendency bias) that do not provide the researcher with much information. Also, the fact that the frequency of engaging in these acts of aggression are to be evaluated in reference of the respondent's behaviour over the past month allows for less information to be given, as it is probably unlikely that even a fairly aggressive person would have engaged so frequently (28 questions) in for example destroying property of others, storming out of a room, cursing others, taking something that belonged to someone else, hitting or pushing others and gossiping. Ramirez (1993) also

points out that different situations call for different kinds of acts of aggression. For example, communication problems causing aggression between people would most probably result in indirect aggression or maybe a verbal attack, whereas physical aggression would take place in other more vital circumstances such as defence of life. Few people strike out directly at the people they live or work with (Richardson & Hammock, 2003). If the scale of the RCRQ was reduced to an even-numbered scale and the frequency of the aggressive behaviour was extended to cover a longer period of time, this instrument would probably have provided more information and a much stronger classification regarding the groups' levels of direct and indirect aggression. Furthermore, the instrument does not take in consideration what the real circumstances of engaging in these acts of aggression were and how much an individual was provoked in these situations.
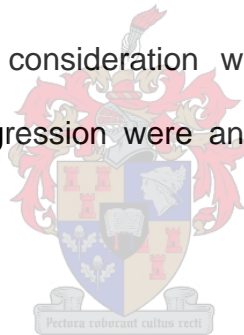
Buhrmester et al. (1988) states that "it is commonly recognised that social competence is multifaceted" and that their Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ) attempts to address this through identifying five task domains of competence. They also acknowledge that these domains do not exhaustively cover all important spheres of social competence. Furthermore, like the RCRQ, this 5-point scale questionnaire is vulnerable to central tendency bias.

The instruments used attempt to quantify two very complicated aspects of human behaviour. One should also consider that the possible relationship between

social competence and aggression is probably far more complex than what can be captured by these two independent questionnaires.

Lastly, both these instruments are self-report measures. This tends to create a question regarding the issue of honest responses (Österman, et al. 1998). Aggression is socially undesirable and especially indirect aggression is performed to harm someone while avoiding identification of the perpetrator. Therefore, self estimations may be unreliable, especially in South Africa where violence is a very contentious issue.

As discussed, the coloured and black groups who participated in this study could be seen as exceptional groups which do not really represent their general populations. This means that the results obtained in the present study are probably only applicable to university students. An important limitation is that all the participants were volunteers and this may have skewed the results as highly aggressive students, for example, could have decided against participating in the research project.

The role of the lecturers who assisted with the administering of the questionnaires can also not be ignored, as they could have had an influence on the participants.

8.9   Recommendations

Further research is needed before a conclusion can be reached about the role of social competence in the prevalence of aggression in South Africa.   Such research should take more factors into account that affect aggressive behaviour (i.e. more information about the situation and the gender of the instigator and the target).   It is also of great importance to choose participants who are representative of their cultural populations in order to be able to generalise the results of such a study.   It is also suggested that follow-up studies are undertaken to investigate the areas where the results in this study are in conflict with the general findings of other researchers. This might establish whether the discrepancies suggest a change in the trends of reported aggression and social skills or whether it is an isolated finding. The reasons behind these findings may open up relevant questions to be addressed in further studies.
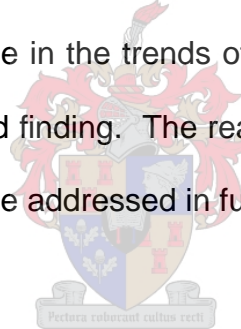
9   CONCLUSION

Violence and aggression are a critical problem in South Africa. The acquisition of the necessary social skills to deal with conflict situations in appropriate and socially acceptable ways are of utmost importance as it may mitigate the problem. This exploratory study was undertaken with the aim to investigate the relationship between social competence and levels of direct and indirect aggression between different cultural groups in South Africa. Overall, a poor relationship was found between aggression and interpersonal competence. A break down of various indicators appeared a promising approach. Strong cultural, gender and interaction effects were found.

The results showed poor but significant relationships between aggression and social competence. Strong significant cultural, gender and interaction effects were found. It was found that direct aggression is positively associated with the ability to initiate relationships as well as negative assertion, but there was a negative correlation with empathy. Indirect aggression was found to be negatively correlated with negative assertion. However, less significant results were found between cultural groups that do not fully reflect the results obtained for the total group. Significant gender differences for direct aggression were reported by the coloured and white groups with females engaging in less direct aggression than males. For indirect aggression it was reported that coloured females display significantly less aggression than males. The only significant cross-cultural difference in aggression for males was found for direct aggression

where coloured males reported higher levels than the other groups. White females displayed significantly less direct aggression whilst coloured females reported significantly lower levels of indirect aggression than the other groups. Regarding social competence, significant gender differences were found in the black group for negative assertion and interpersonal conflict and within all three groups for empathy. Finally, significant cross-cultural differences were reported in four of the five domains of social competence.

Enough evidence was found for high social competence to be associated with relatively low levels of aggression. These findings can make a significant contribution towards further research in this field and the subsequent development and implementation of more social skills programmes aimed at children. Such social competence training programmes may equip the next generation with sufficient skills to handle conflict and aggression in an acceptable manner and may subsequently reduce violence in our society.

This study has also clearly highlighted the need for careful consideration of cultural factors. Particularly in a country like South Africa that is known for its cultural diversity, an investigation into aggression, social competence and gender require the involvement of socio-cultural factors to understand the multiple relationships and possible discrepancies with findings of other studies.

The nature of aggression remains a critically important area for research. Further work is needed to enhance a better understanding of aggression in order to maybe, ultimately, influence the dangerous effect that violence has on individuals and society, especially in South Africa. The possible role of social competence training in an effort to mitigate aggression is a very important one as it has been demonstrated that there is a significant negative relationship between aggression and social competence. Follow-up studies are recommended to investigate this relationship between aggression and social competence in order to be able to compile relevant and efficient social competence training courses which may reduce the high prevalence of aggression in South Africa. Such training programmes should already be implemented at school level.

With the enormous problem of aggression in South Africa, it is hoped that the insight gained from this research will contribute another step towards breaking the cycle of violence through better utilisation of social competence training.

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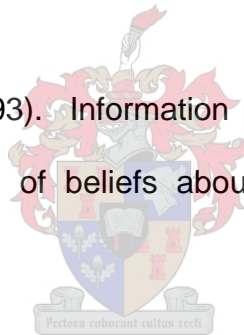
APPENDIX 1 (Demographic Questionnaire)

YOUR RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRES WILL BE TREATED AS ANONYMOUS AND CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL ONLY BE USED FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES. PLEASE ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS. Mark the appropriate answer with an X or fill in the answer when required.

1 **Ethnic Group**

Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Other

2 **Gender**

Male	1
Female	2

3 **Nationality**

South African	1
Other	2

4 **Home Language**

English	1
Afrikaans	2
Xhosa	3
Zulu	4
Swazi	5
Ndebele	6
Sotho	7
Twana	8
Pedi	9
Shangaan/Tsonga	10
Venda	11
European Language	12
Eastern Language	13
Other	14

5 **Age**

	years

6 **Course (e.g. BA Music)**

7 **Marital Status**

Single	1
Married	2
Divorced	3

8 **Where did you grow up (mostly)?**

City	1
Town/Village	2
Farm	3

9 **Occupation of**

Father	
Mother	
Guardian	

APPENDIX 2 (Richardson Conflict Response Questionnaire)

Think of all the times in the past month or so in which someone did or said something to make you angry. indicate how frequently you did the following in those situations. please make an x over the number that best describes how you acted.

1. Yelled or screamed at them.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
2. Did things to irritate them.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
3. Threatened to hit or throw something at them.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
4. Made up stories to get them in trouble.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
5. Did not show that I was angry.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
6. Cursed at them.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
7. Threw something at them.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
8. Tried to make them look stupid.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
9. Stormed out of the room.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
10. Made negative comments about their appearance to someone else.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
11. Hit (or tried to hit) them with something hard.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
12. Insulted them or called them names to their face.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
13. Talked the matter over.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
14. Spread rumours about them.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
15. Sulked and refused to talk about it.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
16. Kicked (or tried to kick) the other person.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
17. Dropped the matter entirely.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
18. Took something that belonged to them.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
19. Hit (or tried to hit) the other person with my hand or fist.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
20. Gossiped about them behind their back.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
21. Pushed, grabbed or shoved them.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
22. Called them names behind their back.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
23. Told others not to associate with them.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
24. Waited until I calmed down and then discussed the problem.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
25. Told others about the matter.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
26. Threw something (but not at the other) or smashed something.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
27. Destroyed or damaged something that belonged to them.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often
28. Gathered other friends to my side.	1. never	2. seldom	3. sometimes	4. often	5. very often

APPENDIX 3 (Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire)

Please use the 5-point rating scale to indicate with an X your level of comfort in handling the situation.

1 "I'M POOR AT HIS; I'd feel so uncomfortable and unable to handle this situation. I'd avoid it if possible".

2 "I'M ONLY FAIR AT THIS; I'd feel uncomfortable and would have lots of difficulty handling this situation".

3 "I'M OK AT THIS; I'd feel somewhat uncomfortable and have some difficulty handing this situation".

4 "I'M GOOD AT THIS; I'd feel quite comfortable and able to handle this situation".

5 "I'M EXTREMELY GOOD AT THIS; I'd feel very comfortable and could handle this situation very well".

Poor at this	**Fair** at this	**OK** at this	**Good** at this	**Extremely Good** at this
1	2	3	4	5

1	Asking or suggesting to someone new that you get together and do something, e.g. go out together.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Telling a companion you don't like a certain way he or she has been treating you.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Revealing something intimate about yourself while talking with someone you're just getting to know.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Helping a close companion work though his or her thoughts and feelings about a major life decision, e.g., a career choice	1	2	3	4	5
5	Being able to admit that you might be wrong when a disagreement with a close companion begins to build into a serious fight.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Finding and suggesting things to do with new people whom you find interesting and attractive.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Saying "no" when a date/acquaintance asks you to do something you don't want to do.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Confiding in a new friend/date and letting him or her see your softer, more sensitive side.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Being able to patiently and sensitively listen to a companion "let off steam" about outside problems s/he is having.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Being able to put begrudging (resentful) feelings aside when having a fight with a close companion.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Carrying on conversations with someone new whom you think you might like to get to know.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Turning down a request by a companion that is unreasonable.	1	2	3	4	5

Poor at this	Fair at this	OK at this	Good at this	Extremely Good at this
1	2	3	4	5

13	Telling a close companion things about yourself that you're ashamed of.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Helping a close companion get to the heart of a problem s/he is experiencing	1	2	3	4	5
15	When having a conflict with a close companion, really listening to his or her complaints and not trying to "read" his/her mind.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Being an interesting and enjoyable person to be with when first getting to know people.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Standing up for your rights when a companion is neglecting you or being inconsiderate.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Letting a new companion get to know the "real you".	1	2	3	4	5
19	Helping a close companion cope with family or roommate problems.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Being able to take a companion's perspective in a fight and really understand his or her point of view.	1	2	3	4	5
21	Introducing yourself to someone you might like to get to know (or date).	1	2	3	4	5
22	Telling a date/acquaintance that he or she has done something that embarrasses you.	1	2	3	4	5
23	Letting down your protective "outer shell" and trusting a close companion.	1	2	3	4	5
24	Being a good and sensitive listener for a companion who is upset.	1	2	3	4	5
25	Refraining from saying things that might cause a disagreement to build into a big fight.	1	2	3	4	5
26	Calling (on the phone) a new date/acquaintance to set up a time to get together and do something.	1	2	3	4	5
27	Confronting your close companion when he or she has broken a promise.	1	2	3	4	5
28	Telling a close companion about the things that secretly make you feel anxious or afraid.	1	2	3	4	5
29	Being able to say and do things to support a close companion when s/he is feeling down.	1	2	3	4	5
30	Being able to work through a specific problem with a companion without resorting to global accusations ("you always do that").	1	2	3	4	5
31	Presenting good first impressions to people you might like to become friends with (or date).	1	2	3	4	5

Poor at this	Fair at this	OK at this	Good at this	Extremely Good at this
1	2	3	4	5

32	Telling a companion that he or she has done something to hurt your feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
33	Telling a close companion how much you appreciate and care for him or her.	1	2	3	4	5
34	Being able to show genuine empathetic concern even when a companion's problem is uninteresting to you.	1	2	3	4	5
35	When angry with a companion, being able to accept that s/he has a valid point of view even if you don't agree with that view.	1	2	3	4	5
36	Going to parties or gatherings where you don't know people well in order to start up new relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
37	Telling a date/acquaintance that he or she has done something that made you angry.	1	2	3	4	5
38	Knowing how to move a conversation with a date/acquaintance beyond superficial talk to really get to know each other.	1	2	3	4	5
39	When a close companion needs help and support, being able to give advice in ways that are well received.	1	2	3	4	5
40	Not exploding at a close companion (even when it is justified) in order to avoid a damaging conflict.	1	2	3	4	5