

## BENDING THE NECK TO THE YOKE OR GETTING UP ON ONE'S HIND LEGS? GETTING TO GRIPS WITH BULLYING

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### INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, ten years after the demise of the apartheid system in South Africa, our society is threatened by spiralling crime levels, unacceptable teenage suicide rates, as well as bullying and other forms of abuse. As is the case in the United States of America (USA) (Van Tassel & Wills in Begoray & Slovinsky 1997), far too many parents are often missing, engaged in long hours of work in low-paying jobs, and lack even the most basic educational skills, resulting in little interest in emotional, social, academic or intellectual pursuits. Thus a vicious cycle is created.

Internationally more than 180 countries have adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which provides minimum protection for our children from all forms of interpersonal violence (Hitting people is wrong 1996). However, in South Africa the unconditional acceptance of authority (which includes exercising physical violence) has not been in question until very recently. In a recent television show – Carte Blanche – a number of participants provided vivid testimony of the severely negative effects of bullying. It was concluded that "the memories [of bullying] take longer to fade ... Sean says he'll never forget" (Bullying 2005: 6).

For the purpose of this article it is taken for granted that bullying is embedded in the broader picture of spiraling violence in South Africa, and that corporal punishment (CP), for instance, is in its essence, merely

an institutionalised form of bullying. The South African Schools Act, Act No. 84 (1996:10) states specifically that

"10. 1) No person may administer corporal punishment at a school to a learner.

*(2) Any person who contravenes subsection (1) is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a sentence that could be imposed for assault."*

Yet this scourge has not disappeared from our shores (Maree & Cherian 2004).

### RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Vithal and Jansen (2002) state that a rationale serves as a statement of

- how a researcher developed an interest in a particular topic; and
- exactly why a researcher believes his/her research is worth conducting.

On a global scale interest in violence, CP and bullying emerged almost a century ago. The banning of CP (and, *mutatis mutandis*, bullying) emerged as a major educational concern as long ago as 1917, when Russia banned corporal punishment (NASP Delegate Assembly, quoted by Riak 1999:1). Since then concerned governments have been endorsing these campaigns: all European countries have abolished this scourge, England has done so and more than half the states in the USA have done likewise. In 1996 South African legislation on corporal punishment in schools

finally fell into line with this worldwide tendency, because corporal punishment does not only affect young people negatively, but its consequences extend deep into adulthood, probably lasting *ad infinitum*.

As a practising psychologist, I have been faced with the following dilemma time after time during therapy: whether to report child abuse (in this case, bullying), thereby violating my client's confidentiality, but trying to see that justice is done, or not reporting (thereby preserving client confidentiality, but not seeing that justice is done) (Watson & Levine 1989). The dividing line is extremely fine.

Certain forms of violence are engulfing our country, and this includes bullying. Far too many people are suffering greatly as a result of bullying and unless authorities adopt a zero tolerance attitude towards this scourge, we have little hope of ever eradicating it.

## **BRIEF THEORETICAL ORIENTATION**

### **Defining the concept "bullying"**

Bullying can be defined broadly as "when someone keeps doing or saying things to have power over another person" (What's bullying? 2005:1) Smith and Sharp, in Sutton (2001:530), refer to bullying as the systematic "abuse of power." Nesor, Ovens, van der Merwe, Morodi, Ladikos and Prinsloo (2004:28) define bullying as "Intentional, repeated hurtful acts, words or other behaviour such as name-calling, threatening or shunning, committed by a child or children against another child or children." This definition will be accepted for the purpose of the current article.

### **Types of bullying**

Nesor, et al. (2004) contend that some of the commonest forms of bullying include physical, verbal, relational, emotional, and sexual bullying, and that

bullies can be classified as proactive and reactive, whereas proactive victims often provoke physical encounters with peers. Other types of bullying include gesture bullying (e.g. non-verbal threatening, intimidating glances, and frightening messages, e.g. SMSs), and extortion bullying (deliberately extracting money or other types of property by threatening victims) (Anti-bullying centre 2005:1).

### **Motives for bullying**

These include having been bullied, being unsettled, imitating the behaviour of role models (e.g. parents), an inadequate self-image, the desire to exercise power, or to control others, ignorance (not realising how harmful their deeds are), perceiving acts of bullying to make the perpetrator look powerful, and being pressurised by peer groups into bullying others (Why do people bully? 2005:1). Furthermore, especially in the workplace, people revert to bullying in order to "assert control over a target who is often envied for his or her talents, social skills or independence" (The work doctor: workplace bullies dump bull on co-workers 2005:2).

### **The link between corporal punishment and bullying**

For the purpose of this article, whatever is said about violence, corporal punishment ("the hitting of children by an adult") (Gregory 1996:461), applies *mutatis mutandis* to bullying as well, especially since it is impossible to divorce these concepts and discuss them separately. It is essential to engage rigorously with "the power of voices," and to identify variables that potentially silence the minority voice (in this research, the voices of the bullied).

### **Factors contributing to a violent society**

Senosi (2003:40) states that the following factors contribute to the prevalence of violence in South African schools: the high level of unemployment,

large discrepancies in wealth and poverty, racial and gender inequality, easy availability of firearms, and patriarchal values and acts. She refers to the following classification of predominantly violent offences in schools:

- Sexual violence (e.g. rape)
- Drug/ alcohol abuse
- Crime (e.g. murder, vandalism)
- Racial/ cultural tensions
- Punishment (emotional/ physical abuse in the form of threats of violence)

Bullying runs through this hierarchy of predominantly violent deeds like a golden thread. In fact, Senosi (2003) concludes that "many learners have become so immune to violent actions that they see violence as an acceptable form of expression and a way of channeling their emotions."

### **Unconstitutionality of bullying**

The South African Constitution Chapter Two of the Bill of Rights, clearly states that:

“Section 9 (Equality):

1. Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.
2. Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.
3. The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

4. No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3). National legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination.

5. Discrimination on one or more of the grounds listed in subsection (3) is unfair unless it is established that the discrimination is fair.

Section 10: Dignity. Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected" (South African Constitution, 1996).

Reading these paragraphs, one cannot help but wonder how the seemingly soft stance authorities often adopt towards bullying is reconciled with the lofty ideals contained in the Constitution.

### **Effects of bullying**

The long-term effects of bullying are not only limited to physical harm, but also include psychological problems, e.g. loss of self-esteem/ self-confidence, an increased risk of suffering stress and related symptoms (Effects of bullying and effects of stress 2005).

Evidence strongly suggests that the experience of violence in the early years, and also when this extends into adolescence, is a major cause of negative behaviour. This includes depression, physical abuse of children, physical abuse of a spouse and other adults, alienation, and masochistic sex (Strauss 1994; Strauss, Sugarman & Giles-Sims 1997).

Humiliating or hurting children has likewise been declared *res non grata*, but it seems as if some adults still find it hard to accept this notion. Raikane (1992) argues that ignorance of the law is no excuse at all (*ignorantia iuris neminem excusat*). Should anyone contravene

provisions of the law or constitution, they should be taken to task. This principle should, in particular, also apply to bullying.

### **Some educational-psychological side-effects of bullying and other forms of violence on persons**

Lytton (1997) argues that "power assertion" correlates positively with delinquency, aggression, academic failure, and other forms of psychopathology (Ellison, Bartkowski & Segal 1996). Lytton (1997:12) convincingly and boldly states "I know of no study contradicting this finding."

The educational-psychological side-effects of bullying (O'Moore & Kirkham 2000) are probably as harmful as the physical effects and include loss of self-esteem, an increase in anxiety and fear, damage to ego functioning, creation or enhancement of feelings of loss, helplessness and humiliation, enhancement of feelings of aggression and destructive and self-destructive behaviours, a shortened attention span, attention-deficit disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and impaired academic achievement. O'Moore and Kirkham (2000) found that both victims and bullies have lower self-esteem levels than their peers who have not bullied or been bullied. CP not only perpetuates the cycle of child abuse, it also impacts negatively on academic achievement (Discipline at school 2004). Schwartz, Farver, Chang and Lee-Shin (2002) found that in South Korea, submissive-withdrawn children are more likely to be bullied than less withdrawn-submissive children. Bullying sends out a signal that it is acceptable to express one's feelings of anger by hitting others in retaliation. When children, natural imitators who learn through modelling, experience that their parents attempt to solve problems by means of physical beating, they often model their behaviour on that of their parents, assuming that it is in order to abuse those smaller than oneself, and do not learn creative solving-problem skills (Hunt 1999:1-3). These matters impact negatively on the creation of an ability to establish meaningful relationships, and

precipitate sexual difficulties in adulthood (Bauer, Dubanowski, Yamauchi & Honbo 1990:289-290; Cryan 1995:37; Hunt 1999:1-3). Bullying in the early years correlates significantly positively with violent behaviour in later years. Research shows that almost all of the most dangerous criminals were regularly threatened and punished during their early years (Hunt 1999:1-3).

### **Positive correlation between unwarranted punishment and crime**

Agnew (1983:234), and Maurer and Wallerstein, quoted by Cryan (1987:151-152; 1995:37), argue conclusively that bullying in the form of administering corporal punishment correlates significantly positively with crime in later life. These authors have found that:

- 18-year-old adolescents in prison are more likely to have received more severe punishment than those who did not and those who received less severe punishment (or no punishment at all).
- A significant correlation exists between severe punishment in early youth and lawbreaking.
- Severe punishment is the single most important correlate of juvenile delinquency.

Schreiber and Haberman (1995) stress the fact that for students engulfed in a culture of violence, classrooms in schools often offer a last chance to expose themselves to more constructive ways of relating to one another. These authors express the view that teachers have to advocate respect for offenders, while critically examining their behaviour. Hostility must be deflated, not giving victims the satisfaction of returned scorn. It should be realised that aggression is a normal psychological response to environmental violence and this reality should be discussed in every class, special course and at assembly.

### **Measures suggested to curb bullying behaviour**

Ball (1989:23-25), Cryan (1987:146-153; 1995:37), Hunt (1999:1-3), Kessler (1985:175-176), and the NASP (1998:1-3) propose a number of measures to reduce the spiral of violence in schools. These include (Maree 2001):

- Measures to change learner behaviour.
- Educating and supporting bullies.
- Educating and supporting parents.
- Educating and supporting teachers.
- Changing the school environment.
- Facilitating the role of consultants and psychologists.
- Involving the state.
- Facilitating an internal locus of control.

Above all it should be kept in mind that although it is much easier to control by authority than to identify and work through deeper-lying reasons for undesirable behaviour, attempts at trying to deal with bullying and other extreme forms of violence will in any event go wrong if the causes and motives for undesirable behaviour are not dealt with appropriately.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The problem that will drive the current research and that is to be investigated in this article is twofold. Firstly, the incidence of bullying in South Africa, not only in schools, but also in society at large will be investigated. Secondly, the long-term effects of bullying as a particular form of violence will be investigated.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Broadly speaking, peoples' beliefs and attitudes regarding bullying and related matters will be investigated. More specifically, the following subquestions will be investigated:

- In what way is bullying depicted in primary and secondary texts?

- What are the findings of previous studies regarding bullying?
- What types of bullying have persons experienced at different stages in their lives?
- What does discourse analysis of a number of discourses, which relate to persons' experiences of the long-term effects of bullying, reveal about the long-term effects of bullying?

### **THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL STANCE**

#### **Research objective**

Mouton (1996:175) asserts that the objective of a research design is to *plan, structure and execute the relevant project in such a way that the validity of the findings is maximised*. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:411), qualitative researchers "rather than deny human subjectivity, take into account subjectivity through methodological strategies." Qualitative researchers rarely if ever remain detached from their data – that is, they hold the view that the subjective view is what matters. I am aware that data collected through qualitative designs are often regarded as subjective, anecdotal, and impressionistic, seemingly lacking in scientific rigour. Nonetheless, I prefer a qualitative design because I believe that research in psychology and education is better conducted through this design. The paradigm in which I will be collecting and analysing my data is interpretivism, and I believe that the perceptions of the respondents in my research are the object of my study. This obviously means that my vision of reality is subjective and constructed, simply because I will be trying to understand this reality rather than knowing it (as in a positivist paradigm). I will start the analysis of the data without a theoretical framework and strive to preserve the respondents' voice by using their words as much as possible and to follow their line of thinking and the context of their remarks in my

interpretations. My aim is to uncover and describe participants' perspectives on events.

I chose an interpretative approach, because my aim is to understand the data epistemologically in a trustworthy way, nonetheless accepting that researchers' perceptions of reality not only vary, but, in fact, differ greatly.

### Qualitative research

A qualitative, explorative, descriptive, subjective and contextual research design was used in this study. An inductive approach was followed where information was obtained from the participant. The research was open and not directed by any preconceived ideas or hypotheses (Olivier, Myburgh & Poggenpoel 2000: :214).

During the process course of this study constructivist and interpretive paradigms were implemented. These paradigms are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: The simplified scheme of different perspectives, research strategies and the methods of data collection and analysis utilised during this study**

PARADIGM	ONTOLOGY	EPISTEMOLOGY	DATA COLLECTION
Interpretive	Reality can be understood and interpreted but not predicted or controlled.	Knowledge arises from observation and interpretation.	Interpretive inquiry: participant observation and interviewing
Constructivist	Reality can only be known by those who personally experience it.	Knowledge is constructed through a process of self-conscious action by those who are personally experiencing such action.	Personal narratives, lived experience.

Adapted from Schurink, in De Vos (1998: 246-247).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Data collection and analysis

For the purpose of the first part of this article a survey was undertaken of both a number of primary and secondary scientific sources on the phenomenon "bullying." In the second part a few newspaper extracts are provided and briefly analysed thematically. In the last part a number of personal stories are provided and analysed. A letter was written to newspapers in which readers were invited to share with me their experiences with regard to bullying<sup>1</sup> with me. The response was overwhelming. Not only did readers share their experiences in this regard with me, but they mostly pointed out that these incidents of bullying resulted in, for instance, a low self-image, and went on to describe numerous ways in which their lives had been permanently affected by this scourge. All these sources

are viewed as narratives, and these discourses are alternative method of research to experimental methods. Within this approach (discourse analysis), the narratives are analysed and put into context.

Data were analysed on the basis of Morse and Field's approach (comprehending, synthesising, theorising and recontextualising) (Morse 1994; Morse, & Field 1996). Table 1 records the criteria considered in the validation process and how these were applied in both data collection and data analysis.

### Quality assurance: data verification

#### *Ensuring validity of the research*

Validity in qualitative research includes both internal-causal inferences and external-generalisability as well as issues of objectivity and reliability. Validity of qualitative designs thus includes the degree to which the

interpretations and concepts used have mutual meaning for both the participant and the researcher. Both parties should therefore agree on the description and composition of events and, most especially, on their meanings (McMillan Schumacher 2001:408 ).

Qualitative research requires the use of various strategies to enhance validity. These strategies are employed to maintain the least amount of interference while increasing the quality of the data. Strategies used to increase and enhance validity during the study are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Data collection and data analysis strategies: Criteria implemented in the validation process, phase two**

<b>Data Collection</b>	
Strategy	Description
Prolonged and persistent field work	Field work allowed interim data analysis and corroboration to ensure the match between my findings and participant reality
Participant language: <i>verbatim</i> accounts	Obtained literal statements from participants, e.g. <i>verbatim</i> accounts of conversations and interviews, as well as quotations from documents.
Low-inference descriptors	Recorded concrete, precise and detailed descriptions of the participants and the situations in field notes.
Member checks	Rephrased and probed to obtain more complete and nuanced meanings during interviews.
Participant review	Participants reviewed the researchers' synthesis of all interviews.
(Adapted from McMillan & Schumacher 2001:408)	
<b>Data analysis</b>	
Participant validation	Where possible, participants were asked to validate the data analysis process. They were also asked whether they could confirm the results of the data analysis throughout the process.
Avoiding subjective interpretation	I acted as objectively as possible while analysing the research data.
Avoiding poor coding of qualitative data	The research data were carefully coded by the researchers and verified by an external coder.
Avoiding making unsupported inferences	Generalisations were not made beyond the capability of the data to support such statements. The external coder assisted in this process.
Avoiding selective use of data	Data were not used selectively to falsely verify findings. The external coder assisted in this process.
Avoiding researcher bias	The researchers guarded against own expectations, misperceptions and need to find answers that would support any preconceived notions about the research. The external coder assisted in this process.

(Adapted from Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000)

### *Ensuring trustworthiness*

Trustworthiness (Guba in De Vos 1998) of the results was facilitated as follows. I am a qualitative researcher with many years' experience in interviewing, and I personally conducted all interviews (where applicable) in an attempt to eliminate bias. I am highly trained and have

vastly experience, not only in teaching at tertiary level, but also in the implementation of anti-bias programmes. Trustworthiness was further enhanced by peer examination (a critical external coder and a critical reader reviewed my work at all stages), independent coding and comparison of information at different stages of the research. The relationship of trust between the

clients and me, and the fact that the clients were motivated to contribute to the curbing of bullying further facilitated trustworthiness.

### **Limitations of the research**

The following are a number of the limitations of the study:

- The study was limited in scope.
- Standardised questionnaires were not used in the research.
- The group was limited and the possibility of statistical inference or generalisation was also limited.
- A different researcher may well interpret the results in a different way.

### **Ethical aspects**

Permission was requested and obtained from all participants to publish the findings anonymously. Assurance was given that no individual would be identified.

### **BRIEF ANALYSIS OF SOME NEWSPAPER EXTRACTS**

A cursory glance at some reports that have appeared in South African newspapers over the past two years reveals that punishment for bullying is on the increase. De-construction of these texts sheds some light on the situation regarding bullying in South Africa at the moment. Extracts were selected if they were found, in the writer's opinion, to embody themes that could shed further light on the situation. It is essential to engage rigorously with "the power of voices," and to identify variables that potentially silence the minority voice (in this research, the voices of the bullied).

Extract 1: "Children who watch TV too often, become bullies. Researchers who studied the behaviour of 1 266 children have found that children who are regarded as bullies, watch TV for an average of five hours a day. Dr.

Frederick Zimmerman (University of Washington in the USA) writes in the journal *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* that children who watch less TV, become less aggressive adults" (Translation) (Price 2005:11).

This type of news item guarantees, as it were, readership interest, due to its sensational nature. However, in the light of the time-honoured legal principle (innocent until proven guilty), obviously, one has to treat the information with due circumspection. Nonetheless, the message seems to be clear: (Excessive) TV watching correlates positively with bullying. I suggest that the excessive amount of violence that is regularly portrayed on TV played a significant contributory role in this finding. This finding merely stresses what scholars have been suggesting for decades, namely that TV watching needs to be monitored closely by parents and other adults.

Extract 2: "At some Cape Town schools, playground rivalries are at risk of taking an altogether more serious turn . . . .

'If you make me go to school today, you'll never see me again. I'll be dead. I'll be shot dead.'

These are the chilling words that alerted Lisa (pseudonym) that there was something more sinister behind her 11-year-old son Mark's feigning illness to avoid school than a dreaded test of incomplete homework.

The boy feared for his life.

'Mark (pseudonym) suddenly changed from a boy who was ready for school long before the rest of the family to one who desperately didn't want to leave the house,' says Lisa.

'Every day he had a new pain – from tummy ache to a headache to a sore throat. At first I believed he was genuinely sick, but after three days, I took him to our doctor, who couldn't find anything wrong with him" (Twiggs 2004:1).

Clearly this item, which, on the surface, appears to be reported in an overly sensational fashion, goes beyond



mere speculation. The author goes on to draw a parallel between bullying and the USA massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, in which 13 children were killed, and 25 wounded by two classmates. From this abstract it is evident that 'softer' forms of bullying have the capacity to spill over into something even worse, namely the supreme act of bullying – killing. Furthermore, the link between somatisation and bullying is abundantly clear from the extract. It is obvious that factors such as the large number of unlicensed firearms in South Africa are exacerbating the problem and facilitating a potentially explosive situation. One needs only to ask if and how often policy makers and education departments embark on joint projects to deal with such crucial matters.

Extract 3: "Increasing cases of victimisation, bullying and harassment of young pupils have led to some schools introducing the mentoring system in an effort to prevent or stamp out such problems.

At Durban High School (DHS) and Durban Preparatory School (DPHS), older pupils are told to mentor their younger classmates to bridge any divisions that might exist.

Richard Neave, principal of DPHS, said they had introduced the 'Prep Pal' system to dispel any elitist notions pupils at their school might have.

'Part of this gives the older boys leadership experience, but it also looks at making the younger boys more recognisable'" (Chetty 2005:1). This extract highlights the fact that many schools have embarked on contingency plans to curb the incidence of bullying at our schools, but that a national strategy has not yet been negotiated to deal with the problem. Clearly, resourceful schools have much to offer their counterparts. It is equally certain that the national education department and provincial education departments need to embark on a national campaign to investigate this problem and present schools with contingency plans. Furthermore, it would be rather one-dimensional to simply charge perpetrators, and, if found guilty, sentence these ogres. At the very least, educational, legal and psychological

experts need to address such cases jointly, a national register must be compiled and findings shared with policy makers.

Extract 4: "With her beautiful voice and outgoing personality, 16-year-old Karabo Nkue seemed to have the world at her feet. She had won a church scholarship to study music in the US, and the behavioural problems that had compelled her parents to place her in George Hofmeyer Girls High, Standerton, seemed to be easing. She had worked her way up the school's hostel grading ranks, earning her a place as a 'wonderful leader' in the school's top hostel, according to principal Pieter Bester. But, when she was accused of having stolen a dress from a friend, she was apparently stripped of her privileges in the space of a day, January 18, and placed in a hostel unsuited to her needs . . . .

'I was stuck because my car had broken down when she called [me] but I promised I would call the school and take her out if she wanted.' But he (Karabo's father) never spoke to his daughter again. 'I was told that just an hour later she drank a bottle of Jik and tried to commit suicide. . . .'

Khoa claims he found diary entries and poems among his daughter's belongings that describe how she was sexually and physically abused by a gang of three girls in her hostel . . .'

'The school says she died on the way to hospital but it isn't true'" (Serrao & Russouw 2005; Bisetty 2003:1). Even though this contribution has been written in true journalist style (well-written, focusing on provocative data) the journalists involved based their story on solid facts. From this extract it is clear that the effects of bullying could be fatal. It also seems clear that, in some respects, the training of prospective teachers in this regard leaves much to be desired. Seemingly cooperation between education departments and training institutions is (at the very least) unsatisfactory.

Extract 5: "The friend of a Bosmansdam High School boy killed in a fight was sent home today after the principal said he could not guarantee the boy's safety.

Many parents have contacted the *Cape Argus* after yesterday's report to paint a picture of a school where a violent gang is terrorising and preying on other pupils. And it has emerged that the boy who died, Chad Rowley, had been sent home for his own safety several days before the holidays . . . .

The father added: 'Now I don't know what to do. Should we send him to another school, or should we leave the area?' " (Schronen 2005).

This particular extract provides conclusive evidence that schools are often powerless to act against bullies and gangs in particular. Furthermore, victims often do not have recourse to any form of emotional, physical, or legal support. Again, the finger seems to point at a particular and puzzling inability by education authorities to deal with this situation.

Extract 6: "Not only are bullies who assault other children less prone to illness, they are also less inclined to suffer from hypochondria and psychosomatic health problems than their classmates who are being bullied, it was reported by British researchers who conducted interviews with more than 1 600 children . . . . More than 40 percent of these children reported being bullied repeatedly, while only four per cent of these children were actually described as 'real bullies.'" (Translation) (Real bullies healthier than their classmates 2005:5). A few trends emerge from this extract, including confirmation that bullies constitute a small, but manipulative and formidable minority, a real force to be reckoned with. Secondly, whereas victims suffer greatly as a result of bullying, the perpetrators mostly walk away unscathed. From my perspective, as a psychologist, it seems clear that 'acting out' is rewarded in these circumstances, whereas victims, who are grossly violated and disempowered by bullying, suffer twice. Firstly, they suffer physical or emotional bullying; secondly, they suffer secondary loss as a result of their feelings of learned helplessness (As a client recently stated: "I have learned that it does not pay to try and defend yourself; you only cause bigger problems. It is best to accept

bullying as a given and not make any further waves." Furthermore, in my experience, this practice is often condoned by parents, who silently accept the *status quo*, stating that they do not want to be seen as "whining parents who complain forever", and teachers, who are often themselves "bullied" by, e.g., gangs or children whose parents are perceived to be omnipotent. In such cases learners/ parents/ teachers would rather remain silent when bullying occurs, for fear of victimisation. A sad state of affairs indeed.

Extract 7: "Sly and manipulative, bullies who once plagued their victims in the school playground are now causing grief with abusive text messages and vitriolic websites.

Cyber-bullying has become so common in Britain that it is estimated that one in four youngsters is targeted via the Internet or cellphones.

"It is a new twist in the old pattern of bullying,' John Carr, from the children's charity NCH, which has studied the "silent" intimidation, said yesterday.

Carr said the most common form of cyber-bullying – text messages to cellphones – meant victims can never escape the harassment.

'In the past, if bullies picked on you at school or on the way home, at least when you got to your bedroom there was some respite,' he said.

With most youngsters now carrying cellphones, the bleep of a text alert heralds for some children, not a chatty message from a friend but the prospect of a frightening threat.

"'We're gonna kill you' and 'Look out! We're going to burn your house down,' are just two examples Carr has come across' " (Schoolyard bullying now also causing hurt in cyberspace 2003:1).

A brand-new dimension is emphasised by this extract, namely the fact that cyber-bullying has arrived. Faceless bullies now have access to one's most private retreat, a phenomenon which has the potential to create havoc, particularly since free-floating anxiety is exacerbated by these vicious SMSs from nameless thugs.

Realising full well that "reading comes from a subjective position" (Wilbraham 1996:164), rendering it "always-already incomplete" (Parker & Burman 1993:189), as researchers we will not claim that our deductions can be made applicable to all learners in all schools in South Africa. We also take into account the fact that other extracts might very well yield "varying discursive *foci* for interpretation" (Wilbraham 1996:164). We would nonetheless venture to propose the themes discussed in the next section, which emerged from a careful analysis of the above-mentioned extracts.

#### **PHASE TWO: ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE CONTAINED IN LETTERS SENT TO THE RESEARCHER, INTERVIEWS, AND TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS**

In this part of the article I will provide extracts from some of the participants' context stories. I have structured the extracts in a way that will reflect the emerging themes of my analysis.

##### a. John's<sup>2</sup> story:

"I would like to share my views and experiences of bullies with you. I believe bullying is still rife in primary schools, although it has probably subsided at secondary schools, if only because people are somewhat much more aware of their constitutional rights in South Africa at the moment. Even bullies are scared of courts! It is so much easier to proceed against a bully. Yes, physical bullying still takes place. But in my mind, emotional bullying leaves deeper, more permanent scars (I am a big guy, people do not often fool around with me). Let me share the following experience with you. I went to a residence at a university, and suffered a lot, specifically due to emotional bullying. The last straw in my case, the precipitating incident that prompted my departure from the residence was the following. All first-year students were instructed to go for a swim, which formed part of orientation (*ontgroening*). Then, a friend and I were told to lie on the paving around the swimming pool and pretend to be seals. I'm quite big, and I probably resembled a stranded whale more than anything else. In

any event, they just found the incident so funny. Come to think of it, it was just the last straw.

A few more thoughts: I think you should focus on emotional bullying, especially in high school. However, I guess it is very difficult to prove that in a court. Furthermore, how do bullies target their victims? In my experience, people are targeted specifically on account of being different in some way or another, be it emotional, physical, intellectual, or social. For some reason or other, people sense and latch on to these differences very quickly. It is so sad, and I can tell you that bullying impacts drastically on people's lives. Why do people bully other people? The obvious answer lies in the fact that some people crave power, but probably also because they suffer from low self-esteem. Nature? Survival of the fittest? I don't know... I guess that the problem is exacerbated when persons from many different culture groups, language groups, religious beliefs are grouped together. Today, one simply has to be more people-centred. What constitutes a joke for one, constitutes harassment for another ... what a fine line."

b. Ann's story: "I am so relieved to be able to tell my story at last! My daughter was called a white rat (*witrot*) because she has blond hair and her eyes are blue. She was also told (in Afrikaans) that she was "*die see in Engels*" (beach, pronounced bitch). I cannot begin to tell you what else my child had to endure. The main perpetrator, the sibling of a teacher, clearly felt threatened by my daughter's presence, due to the fact that she (my daughter) was a very strong candidate for headgirl, for which reason she needed to be eliminated at all costs. This took place with the full blessing of the perpetrator's mother. To cut a long story short: Thorough investigation by the school could not identify one single mistake by my daughter. However, ostensibly to protect her, she was transferred to another class. Not unexpectedly, she was not chosen headgirl or even vice-headgirl. Sad as this was, we moved on and she kept on achieving exceptionally well."

c. Jane's story: "Numerous people related or close to me, or I, have suffered the following forms of bullying at school:

i. Physical bullying (e.g. tripping, pulling one's hair, beating, stepping on toes/ heels).

ii. Emotional bullying. Mocking/ ridiculing, using abusive names, pasting notes on us (kick this a.....e), sick telephone calls, e.g. breathing deeply, not saying a word, mocking poor persons' way of dressing, their clothes, their homes, their cars." [ The role of the media in encouraging (especially 'trivial forms of violence ... e.g. insulting someone or verbally threatening them') cannot be underestimated (Potter & Warren 1998:55). Bandura, in Potter and Warren (1998) surmises that social cognitive theory indicates that these acts are not discouraged, because they are portrayed in a context which is not associated with punishment, remorse, or harm done to victims. In fact, these deeds are portrayed as typical of heroic perpetrators (Potter & Warren 1998:55). This phenomenon increases the chances of this type of behaviour being imitated.]

"iii. Damaging persons' property (tearing up school books, stealing his/her sandwiches, smudging/ soiling their clothing).

Why do they do it? In my experience, the typical bullies are the ones who do not receive sufficient love at home, whose parents are not good role models (e.g. hitting their spouses, their children, or other people). The typical profile of a bully is the following: Both parents work, or simply do not devote sufficient time to their children. Poor self-image – they are not at peace with either themselves or God. Since they cannot not earn respect, they try to instigate fear. Often, bullies are the big ones with strong bodies; likewise, they are often bored and turn to bullying as a form of sick entertainment.

The profile of a victim... Often an introverted, lonely person, who has been taught not to fight back. More often than not, the victim has some quality that the perpetrator envies, or is a person with a disability, e.g. wearing glasses. I guess parents have to deal with bullying by looking at it from a Biblical perspective (In Galatians 5 verse 22, it is said: '*Die vrug van die gees,*

*daarteenoor, is liefde, vreugde, vrede, geduld, vriendelikheid, goedhartigheid ... en selfbeheersing'* ('The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance ...'). In other words, be patient ... and bear with the suffering; turn the other cheek.)

What worries me greatly, is the fact that teachers often blame the victim for not standing his or her ground, for being a 'coward', or for failing to win the 'trust' of the bully. What a travesty of justice it is that victims are often branded squealers (*klikbekke*)." )

d. Judy's story: "I have had first-hand experience of being bullied at school, but before I tell you my story, let me stress a few matters. Bullies do not allow one even one's most basic needs, like being recognised as a person. Bullies function particularly well in groups, where their sick attitudes and deeds are condoned and strengthened. Interestingly enough, bullies are often like chameleons. Away from their partners-in-crime, or when they need a favour from you, they pull Jekyll-and-Hyde stunts and undergo a dramatic change, often changing into quite nice persons. However, back in their groups, they revert to their sick ways. What hurt me more than anything, were the many instances when I was just totally ignored, as if I didn't exist. The consistent message was: as a human being, you are not good enough. Do not sit in this chair, it has already been taken. Do not join our group, you do not **belong** here.

Much as I was led to believe that bullies suffer from a low self-image, in my case the biggest culprits were the siblings of the stinking rich; the so-called untouchables. Or even the siblings of teachers (even headmasters and headmistresses).

It is wrong to believe that all victims are introverts, as I am an extrovert, no denying that.

I once spoke to the residential psychologist, and her words comforted me to an extent, but I realised that that was where it stopped. She offered no concrete support at all, even though, in Grades 10, 11, and 12, I was probably the unhappiest child in our school. Yes, I got some revenge, when, a few years ago, the then headgirl

phoned me and invited me to a class reunion. I simply responded 'Thanks, but I am not in the least interested.' When I went to university, everything changed. I was accepted, I achieved well, I enjoyed life, even though the bullies still ignored my existence. Now let me tell you about the ways in which bullying has impacted on my current life.

First of all, I would never have enrolled for the field of study that I chose at the time. I probably chose it on account of my feelings of desolation and being rejected. I have come to the realisation that all people play games, throughout their lives.

Secondly, I have raised my children in such a way as to ensure that they will never, ever consider themselves to be better than others.

I discovered who I really am in a most painful way ... and today I kind of like myself! I have learned that selfworth is increased by serving others.

More than anything, though, I have learned to be true to myself, and I have nurtured this virtue in my own children. I have taught them that people will often leave you in the lurch, betray you, reject you, but that times do change. Even though other people will reject you, you simply have to remain true to yourself."

e. Edith's story: First of all: I am phoning you because I want complete assurance that my story will remain anonymous ... I don't want anyone else to know that I talked with you. In a nutshell: I was brutally bullied at school, to the point of being sexually abused. I was shy, and the perpetrators knew full well that I was too shy to tell anyone. I am a depressed and sick person today; I still have repeated nightmares about these nightmarish incidents. At times I think I hate myself for not standing up to these criminals (*kriminele*). I would have felt so much better if I had had at least some opportunity to get some revenge. Often I was told: 'You will not tell anyone, because no one will believe you.' I am so angry. I studied law, but consequently dropped out, because I realised that my reasons for doing so were wrong."

g. Peter's story: "I was a smallish guy, soft-spoken, and

I was bullied consistently. Not always in the sense of being hit (that, too, though), but rather in the form of being mocked all the time. One specific boy would always squeeze me (*my vasgedruk*) until it hurt badly, in front of a teacher, who just smiled sheepishly but did nothing. On another occasion, I was thrown to the ground in a physical education class, in full view of the teacher, who never said a word ... probably because the perpetrator was a member of the first rugby team, and teacher's blue-eyed boy. I have never stopped hating these thugs, and their inept teachers. I will always side with the underdog; I will always hate senseless power. And I guess I will always have a low self-esteem."

h. Jim's story: "I am in my forties, and I am suffering from depression and a low self-esteem, jumping from one job to another. I firmly believe it is, at least in part, due to the fact that I was bullied at school. Bullied in the sense of being ignored, being denied membership of the in-groups (*in-groepe*), being mocked because I was suffering from depression. Maybe I should add: as the smallest of three siblings, in my case, bullying was not limited to being bullied by persons outside of my family: I was bullied by my older brother in quite a brutal way. Even to this day, I still believe that no one really likes me. I still see the faces of those guys who bullied me, I still hear their voices. And I hate them for what they did to me."

i. Annie's story: "I have always been a quiet type of person, never a member of the popular clique (*kliiek*). At school I kind of got used to being treated as second best by peers and teachers alike. It never really bothered me, though. However, bullying at school is one thing, bullying in the job situation another. As a female, I was denied the opportunity to apply for promotion when the post was advertised. I was simply told: 'We are looking for a male, a strong person, capable of handling difficult situations,' when I knew full well that I would have been able to deal with problem situations. I have long ago lost the desire to fight the system; it will probably never change."

j. Steven's story: "I don't know if you will be interested in my story, but here goes. I was a dark-skinned person in an all-white school, curly hair and all, and I was ridiculed all the time. I mean, all the time. Do you have any idea how it feels to be a total outcast in a world that hates you for having a different pigmentation? I have learned to forgive, but I will never forget. As an aside: You may think times have changed; let me tell you: they haven't. But that's a different story."

k. X's story: "I had the audacity to enjoy cooking meals, designing clothes, etc. Whereas my parents were absolutely supportive, teachers and classmates (that is, except the ones that suffered rejection for a different reason) treated me as a leper, almost, and called me all sorts of terrible names. What still worries me is the fact that not a single teacher ever attempted to defend or protect me, even though my parents repeatedly paid the headmaster a visit. I despise my old school, I think my classmates and my teachers are to blame for my low self-esteem, at least in part."

l. Y's story: "I am writing from jail .... I am serving a sentence for having stolen money from the manager of our store. I know I am guilty, but I think it is time someone realises that there is another side to the coin. As a child, I could only watch on as the big, strong guys got their way by bullying others such as myself. In my career, I was bullied verbally by a boss who went out of his way to make me feel inferior. The only way I could get back at him was by stealing his money."

I would like to propose the following synopsis (Table 3) of identified themes from these extracts.

These symptoms correlate positively with the findings of other studies, which suggest that victims of bullying include (first and foremost) stress, and stress-related symptoms, including anxiety, sleeplessness, fatigue, vulnerability to physical symptoms (e.g. flu, glandular fever; probably cancer as well), psychological symptoms (e.g. panic attacks, depression, an impaired memory, and

feelings of insecurity), behavioural symptoms (e.g. tearfulness, irritability, withdrawal, and hypersensitivity), as well as effect on the personality (e.g. self-confidence which is destroyed, low self-concept, and loss of self-worth and self-love) (Effects of bullying and effects of stress 2005:2).

## **DISCUSSION**

My current research correlates positively with the findings of Nesor et al (2004) and others, that bullying is pervasive in our society. It is not limited to bullying at school level, but occurs at all levels of society, for example in the family, at tertiary institutions and in the workplace. Moreover, it appears to be rife at managerial level (probably extending to government levels as well (Gumedi in Jordaan 2005). In addition to this, it seems as if the negative aftereffects of bullying are often quite severe and extend well into adult life, in many cases probably never disappearing altogether. It seems that there is no encompassing strategy in place to deal with this potentially devastating crime, which can also destroy lives, literally and figuratively.

From the aforementioned analysis, a number of matters have become clear. Firstly, victims of bullying often quote from the Bible as their *raison d'être* for not retaliating, and for bearing the brunt of frequent vicious attacks. Secondly, the development and operationalisation of sets of school rules and codes of conduct are crucially important factors if bullying is to be curbed. I believe that the drafting of a set of written (and workable) school codes and rules (an overview of which is provided in Maree (1999; 2000), compiled co-operatively by a panel, which should, ideally, at least comprise teachers from different schools, facilitators and consultants, e.g. experts from the field of education law, experts on the constitution, psychologists, parents and children), should be the logical starting point for any intervention programme. These codes and rules should be visible, be communicated to children and their parents on admission (and regularly thereafter), be implemented

consistently and revised on a regular basis (Ball 1989:23-25; Cryan 1987:146-153; 1995:37; Hunt 1999:1-3; Kessler 1985:175-176). Thirdly, a number of solutions

to the problem of violence in schools have already been suggested in an earlier article (Maree 1999; 2000; 2001).

**Table 3: Synopsis of identified themes**

CATEGORY		SUBCATEGORY
Disturbed interpersonal relationships		Perception of God: "I kept my faith, even though I prayed and prayed to no avail" The self (intrapersonal): "I hate myself for allowing them to do that to me" Others (interpersonal) (peer/ social) rejection/ left in the lurch: "I will never forgive my cowardly teachers ..."; "I was inclined to take my frustrations out on my family/ others ..." The environment: "I do not want to have anything to do with my old school ..."
External factors		Non-supportive teachers Weak leadership: Non-supportive (school) environment Parental inability to help External locus of control ("I have no control over what happens to me") Institutionalised bullying/ Inflexible structures ("I understand the reason behind rules, yet, it begs the question as to why creativity is encouraged in some circles, yet stifled by schools, for instance when you are told to do so simply because the teacher told you to") Racism
Internal factors	Intra-psychoic	Fear; anxiety; panic Helplessness Guilt Shame Sadness/ depression Blaming other people/ circumstances Hate
	Behavioural	Sleep disturbances Nightmares Acting out: hurting self/ others Taking revenge/ Desiring to take revenge Lack of impulse control ("I stole because it was my only way of getting back at him.")
	Perception of self/ environment	Poor/ low self-concept Self-hate Low self-esteem Impeded sense of reality testing ("It's just the way society is structured. There is nothing you can do about it")
	Coping mechanisms	Limited capacity for stress management Inadequate capacity for problem-solving (including: how to stop being bullied/ deal with situation) ("I just didn't know, and still don't know, how to handle this type of problem")

(Compiled by: author in conjunction with the external coder)

It is hoped that the findings contained in this article may play some role in exerting pressure on schools to counteract incidences of bullying and, in fact, take strong steps to curb this prehistoric and barbaric practice in schools. Seemingly, many ways of disciplining perpetrators currently are not aimed at building self-discipline, do not take learners' basic needs into account, and do not suggest an attempt at improving the underlying problem of an inadequate configuration of relationships (Porteus, Vally & Ruth 2001).

One of the most interesting themes to emerge from the current research is the finding that teachers, in particular, are not perceived as supportive or helpful. This finding is corroborated by the finding of Nesor et al (2004), who found that only about a quarter of the respondents indicated that teachers provided help to victims of bullying. Likewise, my findings correlate positively with Nesor et al's finding that a large percentage of respondents felt sad and miserable. Likewise, participants in my study expressed the view that younger boys are likely to be more violent and destructive in peer victimization (Nesor et al 2004:45).

However, tempting as it may be to adopt a reductionist approach and summarise the findings of the current study in a few tables, and to suggest a few easy steps to "solve the problem", this approach would neither be helpful nor contributive to a solution of the problem of bullying at a national level or take the debate in the field further. One major *caveat* for significant progress in this debate is the following: more rigorous engagement with the problem is clearly indicated, while further research is also strongly indicated. The signal that is far too often being sent out to defenseless victims is the following: might is right. This indicates potential tragedy for our already crime-ridden society. It seems that perpetrators are still choosing to ignore the ill-effects of this kind of degrading, inhumane behaviour and, by and large, getting away with it.

Morrell (2001:299) maintains that "Laws cannot and will not 'end' violence. The social structures and discourses that maintain violence need to be addressed." Senosi (2003) refers to two consequences of violence in particular: The fact that repeated exposure to violence (bullying in whatever form) inevitably makes the victim more vulnerable to the development of psychological problems; the fact that fear is instilled in victims inevitably impacts negatively on the victim's ability to learn. In the light of the spiral of violence in South Africa, I would like to reiterate that research suggests that bullying is significantly linked to different forms of pathology in later life. The destructive chain, namely violence (including bullying) fear → violence, hate and anxiety → retribution (or an increase in the possibility that a victim might develop pathology) → more violence/ developing more pathology, needs to be broken. Installing fear, "proving" one's authority over inferiors, and getting away with it have no place in our postmodern society.

Lastly: As I was about to conclude this article, my eye happened to fall on the following heading in a national newspaper: *Outydse bestuurstyl kry skuld vir talle dislojale SA werkers* (Old-fashioned management style is blamed for the large number of disloyal SA workers) (Kloppers 2005:15). The article goes on to explain that a mere seven percent of South African workers feel they are emotionally attached to firms employing them (three million respondents took part in the survey worldwide), mainly because they perceive managers to be acting in an autocratic, militaristic style. In true Jungian style, I view this incident as a case of idiosyncrasy, and I simply have to add one more paragraph.

In my opinion, even though it is crucially important to deal with bullying as the cruel, dehumanising and inhumane crime it is at all levels of society, in ways that I have suggested on many occasions, this scourge only represents the tip of the iceberg. To me, bullying is so rife in our society that taking steps at, for instance,



scholastic level only amounts to a mere rearranging of the chairs on the deck of the Titanic. The real roots of bullying can be traced to characteristics in the basic structure of postmodern society. *Id est*, the way in which the filthy rich watch as paupers live in squatter camps, die from hunger, get by without access to the most basic facilities; the continued way in which sexism is still tolerated worldwide; in which unemployment (some say 40% plus in South Africa) and child poverty (estimated at 40% ...) (Folscher, in Motala & Perry 2001:12) are conveniently ignored, and mostly explained away in eloquent terms. I suggest that the only lasting solution to the problem of bullying and related evils is to facilitate the Sternbergian ideal (2001) of wisdom, and specifically its supreme ideal of promoting the common good to be practised by every person, everywhere.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>. We gratefully thank all participants.

<sup>2</sup>. Pseudonyms have been used in the article. All identifying data have been changed to protect participants' identities.

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