

**Children's Expressions of Revenge Fantasies in Response to Trauma from Bullying: A
Psychodynamic Perspective**

by

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DECLARATION

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I, Rebecca Fulbeck, declare that CHILDREN'S EXPRESSIONS OF REVENGE FANTASIES IN RESPONSE TO TRAUMA FROM BULLYING, which I hereby submit for the degree Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at another university. Where secondary material is used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements. I am aware of university policy and implications regarding plagiarism

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ABSTRACT

This research study presents an exploration of revenge fantasies that occur as a response to the trauma that is brought about by bullying. There is a lack of literature specifically related to this field of inquiry. Literature about the phenomenon of bullying and the existence of revenge fantasies from a psychodynamic perspective was used to inform the research. The researcher conducted a focus group with five participants between the ages of 11-13 years old, and employed the use of art to stimulate the participants' narratives. Thematic analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts, and themes related to the participants' experiences of being bullied and their subsequent revenge fantasies emerged. The findings indicated that all the participants had fantasies of revenge directed toward their bullies. Four of the participants' fantasies involved their bullies dying violent deaths – either at their hands, or through suicide - whereas one participant's fantasy involved God exacting revenge on the bully. These findings may have important implications in the therapeutic context, as they may contribute to future pathological behaviour if the revenge fantasies are unresolved.

Keywords: bully, bully-victim, revenge fantasies, psychodynamic perspective, thematic analysis, focus group

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Me with nothing left to lose, plotting my big revenge in the spotlight. Give me violent revenge fantasies as a coping mechanism.

— Chuck Palahniuk, *Invisible Monsters Remix*

1.1 Into the Deep End

When I was 13 years old, I was bullied quite viciously. I had started high school at a school that was new and relatively small. And maybe that created the perfect environment for me – a sheltered, shy and unassuming child fresh to adolescence – to be bullied. I seemed to be behind all the others in so many ways. I was behind the other girls developmentally, so this gave rise to rumours of hermaphroditism. I was behind socially, not knowing how to swear or give witty comebacks in discussions, which led to name-calling and jeers about the way I acted. I was behind on the dating scene, having strict parents who absolutely refused to hear the word ‘boy’ and my name in the same sentence, and this gave rise to rumours of lesbianism. My extra-skinny legs brought me shame and teasing, no matter how long I tried to wear my skirt to cover them. My living out in the countryside as opposed to close to the school and near the ‘it’ crowd led to exclusion and last-minute excuses as to why people couldn’t come to a birthday party or spend a night.

I would hide away in the school library, keeping to myself and immersing myself in books, wrapping myself in stories that provided me with ideas of romance, friendship and acceptance that I couldn’t seem to get at school. When I got home, I would cry alone in my room, wishing that people would accept me, wishing that one day the same people who were causing me so much pain would regret how they had treated me and feel utter remorse for being so cruel. I fantasised about becoming great – doing something that would change the world – and about

these people seeing it and wishing they had treated me better. I dreamt that they would feel for a moment some of what they had done to me, when I snubbed them from my position of fame. I even imagined bumping into them when I was older, and what I would ask them or say to them, alternating between wanting to understand and wanting to enact revenge.

I have always been interested in the bullying phenomenon, particularly the long-term effects that bullying has on its victims. I have had my own personal struggle in dealing with the victimisation I went through as a child, and it has taken many years to stop feeling the hurt and shame that accompanied it. When doing background research for my Honours research proposal, I happened to come across an article on psychodynamics that mentioned revenge fantasies, and this really caught my attention. The more I read about the desire for revenge, the more I started remembering the thoughts I had had as a child, which intrigued me further. Thus, bullying and revenge fantasies became associated in my mind, and I felt I wanted to know more and understand how others manifested their thoughts of revenge towards those who had bullied them. I also wondered if my thoughts of revenge (which continued for many years after the period of bullying) had actually served to prolong the trauma I had experienced from being bullied. However, the questions I had were not answered by the reading I did.

I worked at Itsoseng Clinic in Mamelodi for three years in the course of my psychology training. During that time, I frequently came across expressions of revenge, and this further piqued my interest in the topic. This made me wonder why revenge has not emerged more frequently in psychotherapeutic training.

Thus, with a lack of resources available to study this phenomenon, particularly in the South African context, I thought that my research could start at the very beginning: simply understanding and exploring children's expressions of revenge fantasies following bullying, and who they are directed towards.

This research intends to describe children's expressions of revenge fantasies arising from trauma associated with bullying. Despite its regular appearance in literature, the desire to enact revenge has not received much attention with regard to its expression in the psychotherapeutic context.

This chapter will introduce the research problem and the rationale for conducting the study. It will provide the aims and objectives of the study and definitions of key concepts that will be used in the study.

1.2 Research Problem

More than half of the children living in impoverished communities in South Africa are frequently exposed to some form of violence and trauma from an early age (Bateman, 2015). One environment in particular, where high levels of violence in the form of bullying pervades, is that of the school environment (Laas & Boezaart, 2014). Although literature regarding revenge fantasies exists, there is very little information available about children's experiences of such fantasies following instances of being bullied, particularly in the South African context. This study aims to describe children's expressions of revenge fantasies arising from trauma associated with bullying in order to identify themes related to the expression of the fantasies. It will explore the substance of the fantasies and the persons towards whom the children would like to enact them.

1.3 Clarification of Concepts

A psychodynamic definition of revenge fantasies as a defence mechanism will be used in this study. According to Knoll's (2009) definition, revenge fantasies arise in response to a

perceived injustice in order to protect the individual's ego from "...feelings of shame, loss, guilt, and powerlessness..." (p. 2). This defence mechanism acts by projecting undesirable parts of the victim's self onto others (objects), which results in projective identification (Cilliers, 2012; White, 2004). The function of revenge fantasies is considered by some authors (Goldberg, 2004; Gower, 2013; Horowitz, 2007) to be a compelling desire to restore order in the individual. The restoration of order may take the form of physical acts towards others or the self; or thoughts, feelings, or beliefs regarding others or the self (Goldberg, 2004).

Bullying is defined here as the repeated exposure of a child, by one person or a group of people, to some form of negative actions (physical, verbal or emotional). These actions may include physical violence. In the literature on bullying, the term 'victim' is used to describe the person who is on the receiving end of the bullying behaviour, whether from a systems psychodynamic perspective (Cilliers, 2012), a transactional analysis approach (Opper, 2014), or other frameworks (Twemlow & Sacco, 2004). Within the dynamics of a complex power relationship, bullying interactions result in injury, discomfort, and a sense of victimisation (Opper, 2014; Sung Hong & Espelage, 2012). The sense of victimisation may result in feelings of trauma.

According to Curnow (2007), a person experiences trauma when the ego, which serves as a defence against stimulation that is excessively painful or harmful, is disturbed. Such feelings of trauma may lead to disruptions in the individual's ability to function. This study will research trauma that results from bullying. Accordingly, trauma will be defined here as a disturbance to the ego of the child as the result of bullying behaviour directed towards him or her. The ego disturbance then interferes with the child's capacity to function.

1.4 Justification, Aims and Objectives

Research into revenge fantasies in the therapeutic setting has been overlooked, despite the frequency of their expression (Haen & Weber, 2009). In South Africa, violence and disruptive behaviours occur in the school setting at both the primary and secondary school level and are increasingly problematic (Ndebele & Msiza, 2014). Bully-victimisation in the school setting can lead children to experience symptoms of PTSD (Guzzo, Pace, Lo Cascio, Craparo, & Schimmenti, 2014). Children bully-victims are especially vulnerable to a desire for revenge and are likely to direct their urges for revenge towards themselves or others (Etts, 2008). These feelings and urges can become the basis for future violent behaviour if not addressed, leading to a cycle of retaliation and destruction in an attempt to redress narcissistic injury (Smaller, 2013).

Individuals may fantasise about revenge, though these fantasies may not always manifest. Fantasies that are at risk of manifesting are those that are not worked through (Etts, 2008). Research suggests a link between victimisation in childhood and future offending behaviour (Landau, 2012; Owen & Sweeting, 2007; Schauer & Schauer, 2010; Weierstall et al, 2013). According to Waddell (2006), “those who have been brutalized tend, in turn, to brutalize, overtly or covertly (p. 192).” Bloom explains that people re-enact past injustices in an attempt to get revenge (Bloom, 2001). Thus, by uncovering and exploring the existence of revenge fantasies, it may be possible in future to design interventions that allow for the amelioration of these fantasies in an attempt to avoid future violent behaviour.

The aims of this study were: to uncover and explore children’s expressions of revenge fantasies following bullying; and to understand who these fantasies were directed towards. In order to achieve these aims, the study had the following objectives: 1) to critically explore existing literature on the phenomenon of bullying and revenge fantasies; 2) to conduct a focus

group where narratives were stimulated by art works created by the participants; 3) to record and collect data from the focus group interview; 4) to analyse the data using thematic analysis in order to identify themes; 5) to present the research results and discuss them in accordance with existing psychodynamic literature.

The researcher was interested in the following questions: 1) What are the experiences of children who have been bullied? 2) What is the content of children's revenge fantasies in response to being bullied? 3) Who are these fantasies aimed at?

1.5 Paradigmatic Point of Departure

This study incorporates ideas from a psychodynamic point of departure. The psychodynamic perspective views human behaviour as governed by unconscious drives that manifest in behaviour (Huprich, 2009). Many of the psychological processes that occur in a human being (such as memories, feelings and motives) occur outside of conscious awareness, and so are not readily accessible (Bornstein, 2010; Wilson, 2009). In addition, childhood is seen as a critical period due to the nature of the parent/child relationship which, according to psychodynamic theory, plays a significant role in shaping future adult behaviour (Bornstein, 2010). Psychodynamic theorists study human behaviour by searching for hidden meanings in what is expressed or thought (Spermon, Darlington, & Gibney, 2010). Thus, in order to study and understand human behaviour, qualitative data is appropriate.

Children often have difficulty verbalising their trauma and inner worlds, thus the use of drawings and art provides a psychodynamic tool that allows for these traumatic events to be brought more clearly into consciousness through symbols (Triantoro & Astrid, 2014). In addition, the use of art offers an alternative way of uncovering revenge fantasies, as it is often

easier for the individual to project his/her fantasies, fears and daydreams in images rather than verbally (Naumberg, 1966).

As revenge fantasies are not necessarily apparent to the client or the researcher, they may be operating at an unconscious level and driving the client's behaviour. Thus, by understanding revenge fantasies from a psychodynamic perspective and utilising art as a prompt for narratives, it may be easier to access the fantasies within the unconscious and work in a more appropriate way with them.

1.6 Research Design

As there is little research available related to the topic under investigation, the study design is exploratory in nature. Exploratory research is conducted when there is a limited amount of information available about a particular topic of interest (Manerikar & Manerikar, 2014). It allows for new knowledge to be generated and serve as preliminary research that is conducted to define and elucidate the nature of a problem (Swanson, 2015). In addition to this, a qualitative research methodology was employed. Qualitative research involves studying the world in an interpretive, naturalistic way whereby people are studied in authentic settings and the meanings they bring to their experiences are explored (Denzin, 2008).

In order to achieve this, this study employed the use of a focus group. This method allows people from similar backgrounds the opportunity to become involved in meaningful discussions about the research topic under exploration. (SAGE, 2008).

Children were invited to draw pictures of a bullying event and include thoughts and feelings around this. The instructions were structured and are contained in Appendix 5 of this study. The purpose of the drawings was to stimulate memories, thoughts, and feelings around the traumatic bullying event. The instructions included a focus on revenge fantasy.

The drawings were subsequently used to initiate shared-narratives in the focus group through the assistance of an interview schedule, also contained in Appendix 5. The drawings were not interpreted, only used as a stimulus for narrative and used to supplement the discussion of the participants' narratives. In keeping with the tenets of qualitative research, art allows for an in-depth exploration of the lived experience of the individual through the evocation of emotions, the promotion of reflection and the transformation of thinking (Colucci, 2010). Focus groups allow for enrichment, which, according to Smit and Cilliers (2006), "refers to linking the group's overt content behaviour to the covert and unconscious behaviour towards understanding the researched phenomenon fully." The narrative material was noted and formed the data for analysis.

The research design is elaborated on in Chapter 3.

1.7 Sampling

Purposeful sampling is a type of sampling used to identify research participants who meet certain criteria relevant to the research and who are able to provide information necessary for the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The focus group was comprised of five to eight children between the ages of eleven and thirteen, who were recruited as participants from a local place of safety for children in Pretoria. From this point, the place of safety will be referred to as the Home. This age range was selected because, according to literature, it is the age range in which children are most likely to be bullied at school (Eslea & Rees, 2001; Feldman-Hertz, Donato, & Wright, 2013). The focus group was conducted at the Home. For the purpose of the present study, the participants are referred to as 'children'. The study was conducted in English, so only those fluent in English were considered for inclusion in the sample. This was because the researcher's first language is English.

Participants in the research were identified by the social workers responsible for the children at the Home as children who had experienced victimisation through bullying. Only cases where the child had directly experienced bullying were included in the study.

The guardians of the children who were identified were approached by the researcher, informed about the study and asked about their willingness to allow the children to participate. If the guardians agreed to allow their child to participate, the child was invited to attend an information session with the researcher. The study was explained in a way that the child could understand. This was done using simple terms and language that was not ambiguous or too complex for the child's developmental level. Both caregiver consent and child assent were obtained in writing. There was no advantage or disadvantage to the children, regardless of their decision to participate or not.

1.8 Data Collection Strategies/Procedures

A focus group was conducted with the willing participants, in which they were asked to produce drawings according to specific instructions provided in a guide (see Appendix 5). The drawings were used to verbalise narratives which described instances of revenge fantasies and to elicit reflections on these (Summers & Barber, 2012). This narrative explored what had happened in the past and described how it affected the person in the present – leading to a richer picture of the present (Summers & Barber, 2012). The guide comprised a few open-ended questions that were asked during the course of the focus group. The focus group ran over a period of two hours. The narratives were audio-recorded and transcribed so that the emerging data could be analysed and to ensure that no pertinent information would be omitted. The focus group took place in a private room at the Home and was facilitated by the researcher.

As revenge fantasies are often unconscious, they may appear directly or indirectly (Haen & Weber, 2009). Unconscious material is not only derived from content; it can be found in the actual process of the interview and through projective dynamics that occur between participants (Long & Harding, 2013). All instances of this were noted and explored.

1.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded using thematic analysis, a qualitative research method that is applied in order to organise patterns that are identified in qualitative data into themes in a way that is meaningful (Willig, 2013). It aims to capture the narratives and experiences of participants in the most detailed and accurate way possible, by “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). It is a method that allows the researcher to interpret personal and social meaning within discourse with flexibility, as it can be used with a variety of forms of qualitative data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). In addition, this method of data analysis can be used within various theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data analysis proceeded according to the guidelines laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006). These guidelines are discussed further in Chapter 3.

1.10 Quality Criteria

According to Leung (2015), qualitative research aims “to make sense of and recognize patterns among words in order to build up a meaningful picture without compromising its richness and dimensionality.” The criteria for assessing the quality of this research are hence

different from those used in quantitative research. There is no agreement on exactly what criteria should be used to assess qualitative research, so this study utilised the criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for ensuring rigour, which are: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (as cited in Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). Rigour refers to the truthfulness with which a study is carried out (Noble & Smith, 2015). In addition to this, validity is increased by ensuring the transparency of results and utilising triangulation through supervision and reflexivity (Patton, 1999). Validity refers to how appropriate the tools, data and processes are in the research (Grossoehme, 2014). These criteria are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.11 Ethical Considerations

Conducting research with human subjects requires that certain ethical aspects be adhered to. These ethical principles were observed during the research process and are discussed further in Chapter 3.

1.12 Outline of Chapters

1.12.1 Chapter 1

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research process and background to the research. It presents the aims and objectives for the present study, and justification for conducting the research. It discusses quality and ethical concerns briefly then provides an outline of the chapters in the study.

1.12.2 Chapter 2

Chapter 2 contains a detailed literature review on revenge fantasies from a psychodynamic point of departure. It explores why people might experience these, as well as what the benefits and pitfalls of having them may be.

1.12.3 Chapter 3

Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive description of the methodology utilised in the study. A qualitative research design was used, and data was collected from a focus group of five to eight children. Art was used as a tool to prompt discussion. Participants were chosen by means of purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was performed on the data. The chapter discusses the techniques employed to ensure the quality of the research and addresses the ethical concerns of the study.

1.12.4 Chapter 4

Chapter 4 contains a detailed outline of the data collected from the focus group, as well as the themes identified in the analysis of the data.

1.12.5 Chapter 5

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the data that is presented in Chapter 4. In addition to this, the research findings are discussed and linked to other literature. The research questions are answered here.

1.12.6 Chapter 6

Chapter 6 comprises the conclusion to the study. The limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

1.13 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the research process and highlighted the potential for research into revenge fantasies. The aims and objectives of the research were presented, and an overview of the chapters contained in this mini-dissertation was provided.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

My former bullies pay extra to come backstage and meet me after shows, and I pretend not to know them in front of their friends. It is the most divine pleasure to exact the revenge of the brutalized child that resides within.

— Margaret Cho, *I'm the One that I Want*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents existing literature related to the topic under study in the form of a literature review. The literature presented is taken from studies that have been conducted utilising a psychodynamic point of departure. There is currently a lack of specific local and international literature regarding children's revenge fantasies following bullying experiences, so literature from research that is similar to the topic under study has been included in order to provide a deeper understanding of the current research. The chapter begins with a brief background to the study, which is followed by a discussion of the chosen paradigmatic point of departure. The remainder of the chapter explores trauma, bullying and revenge fantasies from a psychodynamic point of departure. Art as a technique to stimulate narrative is also discussed.

2.2 Background to the Study

South Africa is a country that experiences high levels of bullying victimisation in the school system (Essop, 2017). This issue often presents to psychologists and other professionals who are in contact with children, and it is an issue that I came across continually in my work as a

student psychologist at Itsoseng Clinic. One of the responses that commonly emerged was the desire to “get back” at the bully or bullies. I became curious about whether this desire was always overtly expressed, whether it caused preoccupations and whether it was always directed towards the bully – particularly as I had had my own desire for vengeance when I had been bullied. Thus, I decided to carry out a study aimed at exploring revenge fantasies.

I was motivated in this by the reading that I did regarding revenge fantasies, as well as research I did on the Cycle of Violence theory. The Cycle of Violence theory proposes that violent behaviour is learned, particularly in the family context, and is passed on through generations, with the result that children who have been exposed to abuse or other forms of trauma will grow up to treat others similarly to the ways in which they are used to being treated. This may take the form of punitive or retributive action against the victims themselves, or the perpetrators (Dissel, 2005).

The topic of revenge is extremely pertinent in today’s society, particularly with the abundance of media messages romanticising revenge as an appropriate response to slights and injuries (Haen & Weber, 2009). According to Gower (2013), revenge fantasy serves as “a window into the hurt and suffering of the client. It is an opportunity for exploring any number of issues that might include resistances to maturation or unconscious motivations that arise within and outside the therapeutic relationship” (p. 117). There is hence a need to explore revenge fantasies in the clinical space.

According to Kernberg (1991), revenge serves to intensify hatred, which is a non-pathological response intended to remove threats to the self or significant others. Traumatized individuals often wish to make sense of their trauma by looking for meaning. Meaning may be found through uncovering the link between their current trauma and the intimidating fantasies of their internal worlds that were created at an earlier time, when the survival of the self was threatened (Curnow, 2007).

Victims of bullying are often not afforded the chance to access deep-seated feelings. Art as a stimulus to narrative can provide them with the chance to explore and communicate feelings and thoughts about being bullied (Safran & Safran, 2008).

2.3 Underpinning Theory

A paradigm is based on assumptions regarding the nature of reality, and it is from this basis that research is approached. This basis informs the methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation used in a study (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Kelly, 2006). This research was informed by a psychodynamic paradigm.

Psychodynamic theorists suggest that most psychological processes occur unconsciously, or outside of conscious awareness (Bornstein, 2018). In addition to this, early life experiences affect personality, and can influence individuals throughout their lifetime (McWilliams, 2009). Thus, individuals' thoughts, behaviours and emotional responses are not random, but are the result of a combination of psychological and biological processes (Robinson & Gordon, 2011).

In some instances, these thoughts, feelings or behaviours may be considered unacceptable and may cause individuals to experience anxiety. According to psychodynamic theory, individuals make use of defence mechanisms to protect themselves from this anxiety (Bornstein, 2018). These defence mechanisms are unconscious psychological strategies that occur automatically when individuals feel threatened (Cramer, 2000).

Revenge, according to Gower (2013), is an automatic defensive reaction that occurs in individuals who feel they have been unjustly treated, and it is always likely to occur. It demonstrates the defence mechanisms of splitting and projection that the individual has come to use as a result of earlier problematic child/parent relationships. Lansky (2001) states that revenge "reflects regression to an object world dominated by splitting and projection," whereby

“split-off, hated and destructive aspects of the [oedipal] parent are condensed with the figure of the rival/perpetrator, and this demonized figure is also felt to contain the avenger’s own projected rage” (p. 448).

According to the psychodynamic perspective, individuals have feelings, thoughts and drives that are often unconscious and are often difficult to deal with (Spermon, Darlington, & Gibney, 2010). The psychodynamic approach thus allows for the interpretation of defence mechanisms and unconscious fears and wishes that are not readily accessible to the individual (Schottenbauer, Glass, Arnkoff, & Hafter Gray, 2008).

Approaching this study from a psychodynamic point of departure allowed for unconscious material to be expressed when it had previously been unavailable. In addition, it informed the way in which the data was collected, as it allowed for the use of art as a tool to stimulate narrative and bring the unconscious into conscious awareness.

2.4 Prevalence in South Africa

Bullying occurs globally and in a variety of settings, but when it occurs in the school setting it affects the safety of the school environment – an environment that is supposed to facilitate socialisation and learning (de Wet, 2005). Bullying is a common occurrence in South African schools in particular, with one study revealing the rate of bullying incidences to be as high as 61% in a sample taken from a group of Tshwane high-school students (Neser, Ovens, van der Merwe, Morodi & Ladikos, 2003; Protogerou & Flisher, 2012). These schools are characterised by high levels of disruptive and violent behaviours (Marais & Meier, 2010; South African Council of Educators, 2011). Maree (2005) claims that bullying episodes are rife in South African schools, and that this is exacerbated by the fact that there are violent acts consistently experienced in communities, which children then mimic in the school context.

Statistics on the occurrence of bullying in South African schools are not collected frequently, with the last study having been conducted in 2012 (Laas & Boezaart, 2014). This study was carried out by the University of South Africa and revealed that 32.2% of bullying incidents happen at school during class, while 29.3% of these incidents occur at school after class (as cited in Laas & Boezaart, 2014). The exact age at which children are most likely to be exposed to bullying incidents in South Africa is unknown, owing to a lack of research carried out in this regard. In studies conducted overseas, it was found that aggressive, covert bullying behaviour occurs most frequently in the 11 to 13-year-old age group, with a decline in prevalence occurring as age increases (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Eslea & Rees, 2001; Feldman-Hertz, Donato & Wright, 2013).

However, in order to have a clearer picture of the frequency and occurrence of bullying in South African schools, more research into this phenomenon is needed.

2.5 Bullying and Trauma

Children who are subjected to bullying may be impacted psychologically and physically, with long-lasting effects on their sense of self (Laas & Boezaart, 2014). According to Campbell and Morrison (2007), various studies have found that victims of bullying often experience symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Indeed, any event that is or is perceived to be life-threatening, such as bullying (Nielsen, Tangen, Idsoe, Berge-Matthiesen, & Mageroy, 2015), often leads individuals who are exposed to this event to experience trauma (APA, 2015). Anna Freud (1967) postulated that the term ‘trauma’ applies to circumstances where it is clear that the ego is unable to carry out its functions as a result of being overwhelmed and is therefore unable to use its usual defences. A consequence of the overwhelmed ego is that a significant traumatic experience in childhood

can interrupt a child's development, imprinting itself permanently on a child's conscious and unconscious memory, causing flashbacks, behavioural re-enactments, affective re-experiencing and trauma-related fears and dreams (Gaensbauer & Jordan, 2009). This overwhelmed ego is evident in the three major symptom clusters of trauma: re-experiencing, avoidance, and hyperarousal (Royal College of Psychiatrists' Research Unit, 2005).

A child experiences an event as traumatic when they are unable to process it emotionally and cognitively because of the internal and external threat it poses (Sawyer, Williams, DeLapp, & Davis, 2016). The event may overwhelm the child, with the result that they feel completely helpless as well as changed and detached from their mind and body (Steele & Malchiodi, 2012).

In the case of bullying, if the traumatised child is not provided with the proper support, they may find it difficult to find a context for their victimisation, with the result that the child will internalise a sense of hopelessness, shame, and hatred (Haen & Weber, 2009). Feelings of helplessness that are caused by the trauma can also become the starting point for violent behaviour resulting in a pattern of violence that is repeated, as each perceived narcissistic injury requires some form of retaliation (Smaller, 2013). In addition, this victimisation may cause the child to experience a variety of cognitive and emotional processes, which include experiencing revenge feelings or having fantasies about revenge (Gäbler and Maercker, 2011).

2.6 The Psychodynamics of Bullying

Curnow (2007) explains that, in an attempt to understand an experience, people search for meaning. This meaning is created when a person deals with difficult past relationships and events. It becomes entrenched in the person, so when the person experiences trauma in the present, it is connected to this meaning (which also influences relationships later in the person's life). Thus, it is important to understand the manner in which the person has linked the trauma

to their inner world of scary fantasies belonging to a time in their past when there was a threat to the survival of the self. Psychodynamic theory offers insight into how this occurs in a bullying situation.

Both victims and bullies are vulnerable to the development of narcissistic traits which lead to the aspects (such as helplessness, trauma, rage and violence) that characterise the bullying experience for both parties (Smaller, 2013). Exposure to traumatic helplessness in early life lays the foundation for narcissistic rage that is unregulated, and any later narcissistic injuries to the already vulnerable individual influence whether they adopt the role of the bully or the victim (Smaller, 2013). Narcissistic rage can emerge in many ways, but each expression of it is characterised by the same fundamental feature: the desire to get even and to undo the hurt that was caused (Kohut, 1973; Zulueta, 2006). Thus, the person who bullies (who is usually a victim of some form of traumatisation at home) re-enacts the traumatic experience whereby they were a passive recipient in response to their feelings of helplessness. The victim then experiences helplessness, and its associated passive behaviours, and the bullying behaviour is perpetuated (Smaller, 2013, Twemlow, 2000).

Projective identification occurs when an individual takes an aspect of the self, or the internal object, splits it off and imagines that it is located in an object external to the self (the other) (White, 2004). The individual then identifies the other with the projected parts and treats the other accordingly in order to achieve some aim (Cilliers, 2012; Waska, 2000; White, 2004). The other also identifies with these feelings, thoughts or behaviours and their behaviour is changed according to the needs of the person who is projecting (Cilliers, 2012).

Another aspect in the bully/victim dynamic is that of boundaries. 'Boundaries', according to psychodynamic perspectives, are unseen barriers that separate the self from others. Individuals who have weak boundaries are more prone to being bullied, as they find it more challenging to resist attempts by others to influence them, or to re-define their identities (White,

2004). According to Namie and Namie (2000), “Much of a person’s identity and self-confidence comes from having appropriate boundaries in place for protection against assaults by bullies who seek only to control and hurt their target” (p. 139).

2.7 Revenge Fantasies

Revenge is the desire to retaliate when a person feels that he or she has been wronged in some way (Haen & Weber, 2009). Wangh (2013) views it as a denial mechanism, something that happens at an unconscious level, and manifests externally in the form of anger and violence. Revenge is pervasive and intense, and often involves rumination about suffering and the person who caused it (Grobbink, Derksen, & van Marle, 2015).

Revenge is a common response to any perceived injustice or harm and is experienced by many people (Gäbler & Maercker, 2010; Lister, 2014). Perceptions about the desire for revenge vary according to cultures and communities: from the desire being a complete taboo, to the expectation to follow through on the desire in a cruel manner (Gower, 2013). Many cultures, currently and historically, have the principle of what Knoll (2010) terms ‘retributive functional symmetry’, whereby an injustice committed by a person is then repaid with a similar injustice to that person.

In numerous African communities, when the wellbeing and harmony of a community is threatened, revenge is endorsed and applied to actions viewed as offensive in order to maintain community peace (Anusiem, 2011). Communities in South Africa, which has its own unique history of violence and oppression, demonstrate low levels of forgiveness for wrongs done to them (Stein, van Honk, & Ellis, 2013). Indeed, many of these communities have adopted their own informal justice systems and ways of policing in order to exact reparations for the wrongs committed against individuals or the entire community (Monaghan, 2008). Children in South

Africa are at particular risk of developing ideas of revenge, as they are exposed to high levels of violence and trauma on a daily basis and have learnt that violence is often the way to respond to violence (Barbarin, Richter, & deWet, 2001; Lockhat & van Niekerk, 2000).

Thoughts of revenge are especially likely in individuals who have been victimised and traumatised by others (Haen & Weber, 2009). When an individual is intentionally harmed by another person or group, the desire for revenge can be highly intense and passionate (Etts, 2008). This desire for revenge is also more likely to present in individuals who are diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than individuals who do not meet the criteria for PTSD (Horowitz, 2007).

2.8 Function of Revenge

McCullough (2008) discusses the notion of revenge as an evolutionary trait in that it is universal to all humans, who have inherited it from past generations through a process of natural selection. This view suggests that we are biologically predisposed to feel a desire for revenge when an injustice is committed.

Revenge fantasies involve the individual adopting a role reversal in which he or she both idealises and demonises the perpetrator (Haen & Weber, 2009). There is a split that occurs between the good experience and the bad (Lister, *Revenge through a looking glass*, 2014). Indeed, the victim's desire for revenge is indicative of the individual's regression to a world of objects, characterised by splitting and projection (LaFarge, 2006; Lansky, 2001; Steiner, 1996). Goldberg (2004) states that revenge feelings begin in childhood when children desire revenge against their parents, and these feelings manifest in dreams, play and fantasy. Infants go through a separation from their mothers when they are weaned, which results in a feeling of loss. The infant then denies this feeling and maintains a fantasy of power over its mother (or

the object) (Klein, 1940). In later life, these individuals repeat this in a pattern of maintaining their sense of control by projecting their sense of neediness onto others and placing the new objects into the positions of weakness and vulnerability from which they are in fact protecting themselves (Lister, 2014). This fantasising and projection places the individual in the defensive position of an avenger who gains some form of remedy for his or her damaged ego through imagining the suffering of the other person and exacting justice for the wrong (Knoll, 2010).

Searles (1956) also saw revenge as a defensive function, one that defends against separation anxiety as well as grief. For him, the vengeful person is unable to let go of the object (the parent figure) towards whom they feel a desire for revenge, thereby severing the attachment. An example of this is provided by Lister (2014), where a female client of his would phone him in the middle of the night to terminate therapy but only did so because she was dependent on him and, as a result, hated him. This hate led to her wanting to disturb him as much as she had felt disturbed by her own parents. Through maintaining revenge fantasies about the other, the individual is able to evade feelings of separation anxiety and grief by having a psychological hold on the other (Wangh, 2013).

It has been suggested that each later trauma or wound has underlying fantasies that are fed by the oedipal trauma, with the result that revenge is taken in adulthood on the replacement object for the individual's parents (Lister 2014). This oedipal trauma is the result of disappointment in the parental figure, and this causes narcissistic rage in the child. As the child matures, this rage is displaced from the early parent who disappointed (who actually becomes an adored oedipal parent), onto another person or object (LaFarge, 2006).

Revenge feelings may arise as a result of attempts to protect a sense of self (Knoll, 2010). According to Rosen (2007), "By focusing on his or her righteous, justified claim to an entitled retribution, the avenger renders its sadism egosyntonic, superego nullifying, and id co-opting."

(p. 603) Indeed, revenge fantasies provide a way for the individual to “attempt to restore the grandiose self” (Rosen, 2007, p. 605).

Kohut (1973) claimed that the need for revenge is fuelled by narcissistic rage brought about by assaults on the self, with the result that a primitive drive for power and control emerges through revenge. One of the prime motivators in fantasising about revenge is humiliation, which is a response to narcissistic insult. Someone who is humiliated feels obliged to pursue revenge against his or her antagonist (Beattie, 2004).

LaFarge (2006) explains that revenge fantasies are proof of narcissistic conflicts that occur early in a child’s life, and that they are easily accessed by the conscious when stimulated by situations involving elevated levels of aggression or injuries to the ego. These injuries disrupt the individual’s sense of self, which leads the individual to feel that his or her story is not important to, or recognised by, others in his or her internal and external world – others whom the individual relies on for recognition (LaFarge, 2006). Thus, the individual feels powerless and his or her ego is damaged in such a way that he or she finds it unbearable (Knoll, 2010). In order to survive this, the individual may, “nurture destructive rage toward the Other that eventually transforms him into an avenger” (Knoll, 2010, p. 89).

Fantasy serves a crucial purpose in dealing with and understanding feelings of revenge, as it allows the individual to redress the wrongful acts against him in a way that does not involve taking physical action and thus provides an outlet for any internalised aggression. However, internal psychological dynamics and social processes that rehearse particular memories of the transgression may cause the feelings of anger towards the wrongful acts and accompanying humiliation to be sustained – which then strengthens a feeling of individual humiliation, anger, vulnerability and victimhood (Kirmayer, 2010). If the individual is unable to fantasize his revenge, he may act out the revenge in order to get relief from the internalised aggression – which is very problematic (Gower, 2013). This acting out may manifest as suicidal or harming

behaviour towards the individual himself, or harming behaviour towards the perpetrator, or towards people or things in the individual's environment (Goldberg, 2004).

Through the maintenance of revenge fantasies, and externalising behaviours related to the fantasies, individuals may gain a sense of renewed purpose and a feeling of control over their now destroyed lives (Horowitz, 2007). Vengeance can act as a barrier to separation anxiety, it can aid in the repression of grief, and it can hold off real or perceived loss, such as a loss of self-esteem, by allowing the individual to deny or avoid feelings associated with that loss (Gabriel & Monaco, 1994).

According to Goldberg (2004), children are prone to revenge fantasies, as they all want revenge against their parents at some point in their lives. Their fantasy play, daydreams and dreams at night contain schemes to get back at their parents for the frustrations that arise during childhood. These frustrations reflect their disappointment in their parents not being able to live up to expectations or to protect them from life's surprises (Goldberg, 2004). Children who have been victimised and traumatised are especially likely to experience revenge fantasies. These children are vulnerable and dependant emotionally and are often likely to turn their desire for revenge on themselves (Etts, 2008; van der Kolk, 1989). However, the degree of aggression directed towards the self depends on the age of the child, with earlier victimisation being associated with higher rates of self-mutilation and suicide attempts (Etts, 2008). Winnicott saw these feelings as an important part of a child's development and believed that suppression of hate would more likely result in destructive behaviour than acceptance of it as a feeling (as cited in Altman, 2010).

Revenge fantasies are an integral characteristic of children who have been exposed to trauma, as they allow children to go beyond their feelings of helplessness (Ryan, 1996). Indeed, the need for revenge can be viewed as a defence that protects the child from the shame that arises from narcissistic injury and this perceived helplessness (LaFarge, 2006).

However, children often experience an inability to prevent these fantasies from manifesting in action, which results in problems with the child integrating into group settings at home or at school (Ryan, 1996). Children who do this often recreate their trauma through behaviour – becoming either perpetrators, or actively avoiding situations or thoughts that remind them of the trauma, becoming preoccupied with thoughts of revenge and retribution (van der Kolk, 2005). A possible result of traumatised children being unable to work through their revenge fantasies is that they may become stuck in an ongoing cycle of activities that attract shame and are followed by vengeful behaviour (Haen & Weber, 2009). According to Murphy (as cited in Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008), the act of revenge is innately unstable, and it is not difficult for vengeance to become a continuing cycle of hatred and retaliation that is insatiable and knows no bounds.

Children who are exposed to trauma that is extremely violent, and who manifest with increasingly severe symptoms of PTSD, tend to have more negative views and beliefs about reconciliation (Kirmayer, 2010). Bayer, Klasen, & Adam (2007) conducted a study on former child soldiers in Uganda and Congo and found that individuals with PTSD symptoms were less open to resolution and possessed a stronger need for revenge. It may be a challenge to let go of this need for revenge, or the anger and hatred felt towards the perpetrator of the trauma. Holding on to these feelings can take over the individual's life, making it harder for the individual to move on and let go (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008).

2.9 Revenge in the Clinical Space

Revenge fantasies may be difficult to uncover or may be expressed indirectly, as they are often unconscious, repressed or dissociated (Haen & Weber, 2009; LaFarge, 2006; Lister, 2014). Thus, they may manifest in a myriad of ways. Durham (2000) suggests that there are

two character types when working with patients who desire revenge. Durham (2000) conceptualised the Vindictive Character, who uses dissociation and acts in a destructive way towards the therapist, acting out their past hurts on the therapist. Durham (2000) also conceptualised the Exploited-Repressive patient, who predominantly uses the defence of repression and has difficulty expressing their feelings at how they have been treated but is able to form a positive transference relationship with the therapist. Patients frequently express their feelings of anger at their perpetrators by directing vengeful acts towards the therapist (Beattie, 2004; Gower, 2013; Horowitz, 2007; Knoll, 2010).

In therapy, traumatised children may enact revenge on themselves, may overtly express their revenge wishes, or may present in a manner that is chaotic or nonsensical (Fonagy & Target, 2003). They may act out their fantasies for revenge on their therapist with verbal assaults, angry outbursts, physical attacks or symbolically, for example by ignoring the therapist's attempts at engaging with them (Haen & Weber, 2009).

It is essential that the therapist be aware of the transference and countertransference that is occurring in the therapeutic setting (Lister, 2014; Malchiodi, 2003). Lambert (1981) emphasises the importance of this, as follows: "The patient who had projected his hostile internal object upon the analyst and unconsciously feels the analyst's hostility, introjects it again... This is the 'vicious circle' of delusion that results from the talion law" (p.151). By focusing and being attentive to the interaction that occurs between the client and the therapist as they create a narrative of the client's desire for revenge, it is possible to understand the dynamics of the fantasies (LaFarge, 2006).

The exact extent and nature of children's revenge fantasies after being bullied is unknown, as specific research into this occurrence has not been conducted. There is hence a dearth of available literature. More research that aims to understand and explore children's wishes to

enact revenge is necessary, particularly in the South African context, so that these fantasies may be uncovered and the nature of them explored.

2.10 Accessing the Unconscious

Psychodynamic theories have had a powerful influence on the development of art as a modality in therapy, to the extent that most art therapy approaches have developed from these theories (Malchiodi, 2003). Because of the influence of psychodynamic theory on art therapy, it is used here to understand the relevance of using art in working with children.

According to Long and Harding (2013), the majority of an individual's thoughts are unconsciously available to them, as they are conveyed indirectly rather than explicitly. This is because of the effects of "repression of unwanted thoughts; psychotic exclusion or destruction of thinking capacity; social and cultural constraints on thinking; historical progression of thoughts; developmental factors in individuals; inherent restrictions on thinking capacities" (Long & Harding, 2013, p.4). Because of this, it may be difficult for an individual to describe traumatic events, or the individual may be reluctant to access these troubling thoughts.

Freud describes the "latency" psychosexual stage – from the age of 6 to 12 years – when children are characterised by underdeveloped egos, possess little insight regarding their fears or anxieties, and have a need to be controlled as they are afraid of revealing too much (Freud, 1943). Klein (1960) explains that art therapy provides a more effective means of accessing the child's inner unconscious world than verbal therapy, as children at this psychosexual stage obtain value from the concreteness and symbolism of art pieces.

Art therapy is supported by literature as a method for uncovering and working with children and adolescents who have had various traumatic experiences (Buschel & Madsen, 2006; Kennedy, 2008; Malchiodi, 2003). Drawings, as opposed to verbal expression, allow the

unconscious to be accessed and explored in narrative (Nossal, 2013). The narratives stimulated by the artworks are verbal enactments of distressing events, unconscious wishes and ways of coping. Thus, the creation of art allows for the inaccessible to become accessible by reflecting the unconscious (Malchiodi, 2011; Simha-Alpern, 2007). It is through the creation of art that children who have been bullied are able to recognise and make concrete their experiences of and feelings about being bullied (Ross, 1996). Therefore, art can be used to facilitate children's narratives of their traumatic experience by providing a stimulus from which to begin describing their trauma (Malchiodi, 2011).

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter explored existing literature related to bullying, trauma, revenge fantasies and art therapy. There is very little literature that links all of these concepts, with the majority of literature focusing on a particular aspect exclusively or combining some of the concepts. The psychodynamic paradigm was explained with its relevance to the research. The following chapter will provide a detailed explanation of the methodology followed in the research process.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

To this day, the boy that used to bully me at school still takes my lunch money. On the plus side, he makes great Subway sandwiches.

– Unknown

3.1 Introduction

This chapter contains a description of the research process and the methodology that was used. A psychodynamic paradigm formed the basis from which the research was conducted and is described in this chapter. A qualitative research design was utilised, which informed the particular techniques that were used in the sampling, data collection and data analysis processes. These procedures are described in detail in this chapter. In addition, issues related to validity, rigour and credibility are discussed. The chapter concludes with ethical issues that arose in the study, and how they were dealt with.

3.2 Research Design

As discussed in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study, in brief, was to explore the manifestation of revenge fantasies in children following bullying experiences. Consequently, the study aimed to describe children's expressions of these in a way that captured what the children were experiencing, while providing clarity into an under-investigated phenomenon. To do this, an exploratory research design was employed. Exploratory research predominantly utilises qualitative data to form generalisations about a phenomenon or a group under study, particularly in a field in which little research exists. These generalisations provide the basis for further study (Stebbins, 2008). In keeping with the descriptive nature of the study, a qualitative method of enquiry was employed. A qualitative research methodology was well-suited to the

research problem, as it can allow for an in-depth focus on meaning as it occurs for the individual (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 1999). Accordingly, it allows for a wide variety of methods to be used to collect information from participants, such as interviews and focus groups (Willig, 2013). Qualitative research uses these methods to explore how an individual perceives and experiences the world he or she lives in (Given, 2008).

Qualitative inquiry is more interested in the process of *doing* research than in acquiring results; it thus attempts to understand *how* individuals perceive reality rather than *what* that reality is (Cooper & White, 2012). It aims to “help people recover, and release themselves, from the constraints of irrational, unproductive, unjust and unsatisfying social structures that limit their self-development and self-determination” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 597). In particular, qualitative interviews characterised by open-ended questions allow participants to represent the world as they see it, thereby giving a voice to the otherwise unheard and offering access to the participants’ own worlds and inner selves (Patton, 2002; Sandelowski, 2002).

3.3 Participants

As qualitative research concentrates on detailed description and depth of data, small samples are typically selected (Durrheim, 2006). It is important that the data collected in any research complements a theoretical framework and contributes to an improved understanding of it (Bernard, 2002). Thus, purposive sampling is an appropriate method of sampling to use, as it allows the researcher to select participants based on specific qualities that they possess or information that they are able to provide (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016; Palys, 2008). This allows the researcher to select individuals who can provide in-depth information on the topic under study (Struwig & Stead, 2001). This study utilised purposive sampling in recruiting participants from the Home for the focus group.

The Home was established in 1987 in the east of Pretoria. It is an independent charity organisation that is responsible for providing care and a place of safety for children who have experienced abuse and neglect in their homes. Children are placed in the Home when one of the South African courts has ordered their removal from their parents' care. There are 250 children currently residing at the Home, between the ages of 18 months and 18 years old. The Home provides the children with housing, clothing, food, security, schooling, and emotional support in the form of therapy and life skills (The Home, 2017).

Children from the Home between the ages of eleven and thirteen were recruited as participants in the study. Participants were chosen for the study on the basis of the following criteria: they needed to fall within a specific age range (11–13 years old); they had to speak English; and they had to have directly experienced bullying at school. This age range was selected because it is the age range in which children are most likely to be bullied at school (Eslea & Rees, 2001; Feldman-Hertz, Donato, & Wright, 2013). The requirement of speaking English was a criterion because it eliminated the need for a translator in an already resource-strapped environment and allowed the researcher to interpret the data more accurately. South African English contains various colloquialisms that have been borrowed from the African languages of the country and from Afrikaans (Silva, 2017). As a result, terms were used by the participants that may be unfamiliar to the reader but are common in everyday spoken English. Where necessary, definitions for these have been provided in the subsequent chapters.

Only between five and eight participants were invited to participate in the study. Focus groups are typically small, ranging in size from five to eight people. Having a small group allows for meaningful interaction between the researcher and participants, and also allows for more in-depth narrative to emerge (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). The choice of a small focus group was also due to the intensive and time-consuming nature of the data analysis. Participants were identified as bully victims by social workers at the Home who work closely

with the children. If they had experienced bullying directly, they were then asked about their willingness to participate in the study and informed that the researcher would see them at an information session with their guardians to explain the purpose of the study.

3.4 Data Collection – Procedures and Instruments

3.4.1 Information Session

The information session provided a platform from which the researcher was able to inform both the participants and their caregivers about the study. The researcher explained the purpose and nature of the study to the group. The consent and assent forms were read to them, and they were then given the opportunity to ask questions for clarification and to express their concerns. The guardians were given informed consent forms to sign, and the children were given assent forms. A date was then agreed upon for the focus group to occur.

3.4.2 Focus Group

One of the qualitative methods that may be used to gather data is focus groups. Focus groups involve a researcher-led interview in which participants are asked to discuss a topic (Gill et al., 2008). They are valuable in that they give individuals the chance to discuss their ideas and opinions in great depth, and they are particularly useful in working with populations that are disempowered, like children, as they allow for thought and verbalisation to be stimulated in a group process (Peterson-Sweeney, 2005). This method of data collection was selected because it allows for a group of people to gather in order to share their perceptions, ideas and feelings about a particular event or area of interest in an environment that is not threatening (Smit & Cilliers, 2006; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). This method of inquiry was therefore chosen as the most appropriate, in that it would provide children who had been bullied with a

space in which to share their experiences with others who had been through similar experiences.

The gathering of data began during the focus group. The focus group was conducted in a private room at the Home and the group meeting lasted two hours. Prior to the commencement of the interview segment of the focus group, the researcher introduced an ice-breaker activity (which is discussed in more detail in section 3.4.3 and Chapter 4). Following this activity, the children were asked to define rules of appropriate behaviour and responses that should be followed for the duration of the focus group.

The session was audio recorded and transcribed. At different points during the focus group, the participants were asked to draw a picture according to instructions provided by the researcher (see Appendix 5). They were given a limited amount of time to complete the drawings. The participants were then asked to show their drawing to the group, explain what they had drawn and engage in a discussion about what their drawing showed. They were asked to explain what their experience at the time of the drawing had been like and were asked additional questions by the researcher when it was necessary to prompt further discussion or encourage verbalisation of unconscious material. The artworks acted as a projection of the participants' inner worlds, allowing them to access their unconscious and express their wishes.

3.4.3 The Use of Art

Art was chosen as a medium to encourage verbal expression of bullying experiences. This is because children often have difficulty expressing their feelings and inner worlds but are enabled to do so by producing art (Case & Dalley, 2014). Art provides a way for individuals to symbolically represent aspects of the self, using unconscious awareness in the art-making process (Rubin, 1999). Art may provide a way of working non-verbally. Image creation is a suitable technique to use with children who have emotional or behavioural difficulties and may

have problems articulating due to speech and language constraints (Case & Dalley, 2014). Van der Kolk (1996, p.195) states: “Prone to action, and deficient in words, these patients can often express their internal states more articulately in physical movements or in pictures than in words.” It provides a way to access the unconscious and allows children to start expressing what they could not express before (Malchiodi, 2003).

As an introduction to the art materials, the children were asked to complete a collaborative drawing in which they each added a body part to complete a person. Following this, the children were asked to draw specific art pieces according to instructions provided by the researcher. The children were then asked to describe for the group what they had drawn. More information was elicited by the researcher posing questions to participants if it was deemed necessary. The questions, which are in a semi-structured format, as well as the instructions can be seen in Appendix 5.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was the method used to analyse the data obtained from the focus group. This method requires the researcher to search for themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Saldaña (2009), a theme is “a *phrase* or *sentence* that identifies what a unit of data is *about* and/or what it *means*.” (p.139). Thematic analysis can be deductive, inductive or a combination of both (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012), though this research utilised an inductive thematic analytical approach. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), themes that are identified in an inductive approach are not influenced by the researcher’s preconceptions or by specific questions asked of the participants. Instead, the themes emerge from the data itself.

This approach has been criticised because of the shortage of clear guidelines for researchers, which has resulted in some researchers not indicating precisely how their results have been

analysed (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Fielden, Sillence, & Little, 2011). In an effort to avoid this, the guidelines (referred to as 'phases') laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006) for conducting thematic analysis were utilised in this research, as a way of providing a clear indication of the procedure followed in this particular data analysis.

The first phase involved transcribing the recordings from the focus group and becoming familiar with the transcript by reading and re-reading it. The second phase comprised the initial coding of the data. Any aspects of the data that were considered interesting or noteworthy were assigned codes that allowed for the data to be organised into meaningful groups. Phase three then involved assembling the codes into possible themes and finding the data that fitted into these themes. The themes were reviewed in phase four to establish their relevance to the codes and the whole data set, and a thematic map of the analysis was created. Phase five involved refinement of the themes by defining them clearly and naming them. The final phase consisted of presenting the results, with extract examples and clear reference to the research question and literature. Although the art itself was not analysed, descriptions of the pictures drawn were used to supplement the participants' answers and to provide a more detailed understanding of the children's experiences. These descriptions were then included in the themes that emerged during the analysis.

3.6 Quality Criteria

As a qualitative methodology was used, the criteria for ensuring validity, reliability and generalisability of the research were different from those used in quantitative research. According to Guenther and Falk (2007), qualitative research cannot be judged by these measures, nor can it be generalised to other samples, as the context-specific nature of social phenomena does not allow for this. However, the validity of the results was increased by

making sure that the research process was transparent, and that all results and conclusions were clear and conclusive (Seale, 2002). In addition, measures to increase authenticity, trustworthiness and credibility were used throughout the study in the form of supervisory meetings, self-reflection and theoretical thinking (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Rigour was further ensured by following the criteria for rigour suggested by Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). These criteria are: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

According to Houghton et. al (2013), credibility is ensured by means of triangulation, peer debriefing and member checking. Dependability and confirmability are increased through reflexivity and an audit trail (which involves providing a rationale for all interpretations and decisions made by the researcher). Transferability is ensured by providing thick descriptions of the original context of the research, so that the reader is able to decide about its transferability to his or her specific context. The present study increased credibility through supervisory meetings and discussions regarding the research. It increased dependability and confirmability with the use of a reflexive journal, which was used regularly by the researcher to record decisions regarding methodology and the reasons behind these. It also recorded what occurred as the study progressed, and reflection about the researcher's own values or interests that emerged.

Approaching research from a psychodynamic perspective introduced another aspect to the topic of rigour – that of interpretation. According to Holloway and Jefferson (2000), in order to be able to interpret any part of a narrative, the whole context needs to be understood. In addition, they suggest that what needs to be kept in mind is the fact that the participant is a defended subject. This is someone who engages in particular discourses out of a need to defend himself or herself from feelings of anxiety (Boydell, 2009; Jefferson & Holloway, 2000).

3. 7 Ethical Considerations

When conducting research, participants should be protected from loss or harm, and the researcher should protect the rights, dignity and psychological well-being of the participants throughout the research process (Willig 2013). This is done by following ethical guidelines, which include: informed consent, no deception, the right to withdraw, debriefing and confidentiality (Wassenaar, 2006). As stated by Kalantri (2003, p.31), “If you carry out or participate in research involving patients or volunteers, it is particularly important that you ensure: (a) as far as you are able, that the research is not contrary to the individual’s interests; (b) that the participants understand that it is research and the results are not predictable.”

3.7.1 Informed Consent/Assent

This study involved recruiting participants who were minors. According to Wassenaar (2006), research that involves minors is complex, both ethically and legally, and should therefore only be carried out with the consent of the minor’s legal guardians. In addition, assent needs to be obtained from the minor.

Participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study in an information session and were given information in the form of a hard copy document. Each participant signed a copy of the assent form, and their guardians signed a copy of the consent form (see Appendix 3 and Appendix 4). Participants were not deceived about the purpose or process of the study. They were informed that their decision to participate in the research was voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw at any time with no consequence to them.

3.7.2 Privacy and Confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained. No identifying names or features were written on documents or transcripts that were collected as data. Participants were reminded of the confidential nature of what was discussed and were asked not to discuss what emerged in the group with others once the session was completed.

3.7.3 Sensitivity to Participants

The researcher was sensitive to the participants' needs by not introducing anything or behaving in a way that was to the benefit of the researcher or the detriment of the participants. This was done by reiterating that participants should discuss only what they felt comfortable discussing, and that their decision not to discuss something would not be met with judgment or discrimination.

3.7.4 Debriefing

Upon completion of the focus group, the participants were debriefed. This debriefing included a discussion about how they had experienced the focus group, and what had come up for them during the session. Participants who showed or expressed any emotional distress or discomfort were referred to a professional counsellor working at the Home to address this.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed exploration of the research design that was employed in this study. Justification for using a qualitative research methodology was provided. The steps that were taken to conduct the research were highlighted and described. Factors pertaining to the quality of the findings were discussed, and ethical considerations were addressed. The

following chapter will introduce the themes that were identified from the focus group discussion. Once the themes were identified, they were further divided into sub-themes where appropriate. The themes and sub-themes are as follows:

Theme 1: Experience of being bullied

Sub-theme 1.1: The bully's power

Sub-theme 1.2: Powerlessness

Theme 2: Manifestations of revenge

Sub-theme 2.1: Revenge at the hands of the avenger

Sub-theme 2.2: Revenge at the hands of the other

Sub-theme 2.3: Revenge on the avenger

Theme 3: Anticipated outcome of revenge

Sub-theme 3.1: Self

Sub-theme 3.2: Change to environment

Chapter 4 – Results

No need for revenge. Just sit back and wait ... those that hurt you will eventually screw up all by themselves ... and if you are lucky, God will let you watch.

— Pravinee Hurbungs, unknown

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the themes that emerged from the focus group that was held during the research procedure. Through a process of immersion in the content of the focus group transcripts, themes and sub-themes appeared and are discussed further here. Descriptions of the pictures are included to substantiate the themes where relevant. The chapter commences with an introduction to the participants and their response to the research in order to provide an idea of what may have influenced what was discussed in the focus group, and the descriptions obtained. Where applicable, the exact words and phrases used by the participants have been used to enrich this chapter.

4.2 Introduction to Participants

Of the five participants who took part in the focus group, three reside in the same house at the Home. The other two reside together in a different house at the Home. The boys range in age from 11-13 years old and are all at primary school, although they do not all attend the same schools. None of the boys speak English as a first language – four speak Afrikaans, and one speaks Setswana – and the interviews were conducted in English. Consequently, there were times when the Afrikaans-speaking boys used terminology common to their first language, but these colloquialisms are widely used in South Africa, as part of general conversation in English.

In order to maintain the integrity of what was discussed in the focus group, no alterations have been made; the participants' words have been used verbatim, and definitions have been provided for colloquialisms where applicable.

4.3 Participant Response

Prior to the focus group, an information session was conducted, during which the participants were introduced to the research topic and informed about the research process. The children thus got to know both the researcher and each other prior to the commencement of the focus group.

The participants were very jovial, chatty and enthusiastic when they arrived for the focus group. Once the focus group proceedings had been explained to them, and time had been given for questions, the children were first asked to draw a collaborative picture as part of an ice-breaker activity, in order to familiarise them with the drawing material and further establish rapport between them. In this activity, the participants were provided with instructions to add body parts to a picture they could not see, in order to complete a person (this is explained in detail in Appendix 5). The children were eager to draw and responded to this task with requests to draw additional pictures. The participants interacted with each other through jokes and gestures, some teasing others. The matter of teasing was addressed when the group came up with rules for the session, specifically through the rule that each person would be allowed to speak without interruption from the other children. The children agreed that I, as the researcher, would be allowed special privileges that they were not – such as being able to touch my cell phone for recording purposes.

Once the ice breaker activity had been concluded, and the rules had been established, the drawing and discussion section of the focus group commenced. The children were first asked

to draw a picture of a time when they had been bullied at school or outside of school. They were then asked to describe what had happened in their picture. The second task involved the children drawing a picture of what they imagined doing or what was happening to the bully drawn in the first picture. They were also asked to describe this. Finally, the children were asked to draw a picture that depicted how they thought they would feel after they had done this to their bullies. They were asked to explain what they had drawn. The participants drew pictures for each task without hesitation, all taking time to portray the scenarios clearly.

Some of the participants did not provide very detailed descriptions of their pictures during the focus group. However, as the group progressed, they began to talk more openly about their drawings when prompted.

The participants struggled to pay attention to the children who spoke at length, with some of the boys becoming disruptive and noisy. This was dealt with by the other participants, who consistently reminded the disruptive members of the agreed-upon rules. Intervention by the researcher only occurred if this was not effective.

Rapport had been established in the information session, so the participants appeared to feel quite comfortable with the researcher, answering questions and listening when I spoke, although they were not always open about information with each other.

4.4 Themes

4.4.1 Theme 1: Experience of being bullied.

The children were asked to draw a picture of a time when they had been bullied at school. They were asked to describe the scenario by referring to these drawings, indicating who the bully was and who they were in the picture. The following sub-themes emerged from the

descriptions of the pictures that were drawn. Please refer to Appendix 6 to view the art works produced by the participants.

4.4.1.1 Sub-Theme 1.1: The bully's power.

This sub-theme encapsulates each of the participants' experiences of the bullies' characteristics and the techniques used by the perpetrators to carry out the bullying.

When discussing their pictures, the participants all described their bullies as being older than them. Participant 4 drew a picture depicting the bully hitting him, as well as his response to this violence, which was drawn further down on the page and showed Participant 4 crying. The bully in both drawings was slightly bigger than Participant 4. When showing the group his picture, he described his bullies as being in higher grades at school: "There's another guy like this. He's in Grade 4. He's in my brother's class neh¹," and "Also, I forgot to tell you also, the other Grade 7s neh, twelve them, they say we were late for class."

Participant 5 drew a picture of his bully and him standing far from each other, while his bully swore at him, and demeaned his mother with derogatory language. He described the bully in the picture to the group in the following way: "He's older than me, he's in Grade 11. It happened in House [omitted], where I am." His bully was also drawn slightly bigger than Participant 5 drew himself.

From the children's explanations, none of the bullies formed a part of the children's friendship groups, and all the bullies seemed to initiate the bullying incidents without provocation. Participant 3's picture showed a much bigger bully hitting him in the face and swearing at him as he did this, while Participant 3 looked surprised, and had tears on his face. When explaining his picture to the group, Participant 3 described an incident where he was

¹ South African slang word meaning "Do you know what I mean?" Used to indicate a question and/or check understanding.

instructed to do something by one person, and then when the person's friend arrived, the person hit him. "I go to school and I play in the sand, then he did come and then he said: 'Stop playing in the sand.' Then I go out then the other friend come... (Gesture of punching and sound effect)." Although the bullying incidents seemed to happen for no reason, Participant 4 spoke about being bullied for monetary reasons: "Then after he say 'Go!', then after he go. Then after that he take my money." In Participant 5's case, the reason he believed his particular bully targeted him was because "He likes to bully everyone."

When describing their pictures, the boys were very willing to discuss what they had been subjected to during these bullying incidents. They tended to speak over each other, using sound effects and gestures to emphasise what they had experienced. Participant 2 drew a picture that demonstrated the violence he had been subjected to, using colour. His picture illustrated a one-eyed bully smiling as he hit him in the face. Blood was pouring from Participant 2's drawn face and was highlighted in red, while his face showed sadness in the form of a down-turned mouth and tears. Participant 2 described two instances of being subjected to physical violence at the hands of his bully in relation to his picture. "He beat me. My nose and mouth it bleed," and "Tannie², the guy that did beat them, called him Superman, he did hit me."

The participants described not only being subjected to physical violence but incidents of verbal abuse from their bullies as well. According to Participant 5, the person who bullied him often swore at him, or used swear words to describe Participant 5's mother, as depicted in his drawing. He explained, "Someone swore my mom and then he said: 'F... you'" and "He's beating me the whole time, slapping me and swearing my mom." Participant 1 drew a picture that illustrated his bully calling him a derogatory name, and him retaliating with swear words. His picture was the only picture where the bully was smaller than the victim, and the bully was,

² A term used to address a woman older than the speaker, often as a sign of respect.

in fact, a female. When describing his picture, he explained a similar bullying incident to the one discussed by Participant 5. “He swore me and I swore him back ... did hit me ...”

4.4.1.2 Sub-Theme 1.2: Powerlessness.

Underlying the participants’ stories is a sense of powerlessness. The bullying incidents that were described from the drawings are unprovoked and seem to be unpredictable, occurring at any moment. The incidents are not once-off but occurred multiple times for each of the children. There is thus a sense of powerlessness in being unable to do anything to stop the bullying. This sense of powerlessness is implied in the discussion, perhaps because the participants are males and are at the age where it is not considered acceptable to admit to what may be considered weakness by others. This sub-theme encompasses the children’s responses to the bullies, as well as interventions by third parties in the bullying incidents.

Participant 4, when showing his first drawing, was openly willing to discuss his reactions to the physical violence he had experienced at the hands of his bully. These reactions ranged from tears, to telling an adult, to walking away. His picture depicted him crying, and he told the group about multiple instances of this once he had described his picture: “Then I cry, then after I never say anything. Then I cry again”; “And Tannie ... said I must tell her if he going to cut me. I’m going to tell her today”; “Then after I just go... after I cry”; and “...sometimes I always leave them beat me then after when they’re done beating me I just crap them. After I say, ‘God is watching you, you’ll get that thing from beating me that you were doing to me,’ then after I just leave, I go.”

Two of the participants described retaliating in response to the attacks by their bullies, and this was illustrated in the drawings. According to Participant 1’s description of his picture, he gave his bully exactly what his bully gave him: “He swore me and I swore him back.” Participant 5 responded with retaliation in the picture that he drew: “Mine said ‘F... you’ and

I said ‘Eff you’”, but then he did not retaliate in a separate incident that occurred that was mentioned after the drawing description: “... I left him.”

What can be deduced from the pictures and the descriptions is that it seems that no matter how the children respond in the moment, the bullies will target them and victimise them. This is also the case when third parties intervene, or the bullies are punished by third parties. Participant 4, while describing his picture, explained the repercussions that his bully faced after attacking him: “This boy, they even did suspend him for seven days after, after I don’t know what his father say. They phone his mother then after his mother come and fetch him. Then after, for seven days, then after he came back on Wednesday. After the other boy like this neh, him and his friend they always bully us. And that boy also, then they suspend them, all of them.” He then described another separate incident in which two people had intervened, but only after the incident: “Then after they laugh, then after the other boys say: “Hey! Do not treat the small boy like that.” Then after they gave me back my paper, my other paper, then after ma’am say: “Why is it, why this boy is he crying?” Then after the other kid says: ‘It’s that two Grade 7s.’ After they went. Then after I go to class.”

4.4.2 Theme 2: Manifestations of revenge.

The children were asked either to draw a new picture or to add to their existing picture. This picture needed to depict an imagined scenario showing what they would like to do to their bully or what they would like to happen to their bully. The following sub-themes emerged from their descriptions of their drawings. Please refer to Appendix 6 to view the art works produced by the participants.

4.4.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Revenge at the hands of the avenger.

Three of the participants drew and described fantasised revenge scenarios in which they were responsible for the deaths of their bullies. This sub-theme encompasses a sense of retribution that is violent, as all the fictional bully ‘murders’ were carried out in such a way that the bullies could not escape their fates at the hands of their avengers. Participant 1’s picture shows him standing on a platform, arms extended, as his bully plummets to his death in a sea of orange lava. He described the picture, in which he pushes his bully into a pit of lava: “I pushed him in then I said ‘die’ ... He burned into death.”

Participant 5 imagined a similar scenario, and his picture depicts him standing above his bully, who has fallen far to his death in a sea of red lava. He provides more detail about the events that would lead to his revenge in the picture. “This is lava, and this is the piece, I’m going to push him”; “This guy zap me because I push him off”; “I bumped the bully off into the volcano and then he died, and then I said: ‘F... you’”. When asked why he had specifically chosen a volcano in his fantasy, he said “Because to let him to die. And burn.”

Participant 3’s picture shows him as an angel floating in the sky, while his bully lies in a coffin next to a tombstone with his name. Flames engulf the bully, while what looks like a demon looks on. Participant 3 described the events of his revenge fantasy leading up to his picture. He explained that he was responsible for his bully’s death, as he had stabbed him in the fantasy: “I did kill him ’cause he swear everything ... he swear my mother ... then I throw him with a knife in his kop³ and then he go to hell.”

³ “Kop” is an Afrikaans term for “head”.

4.4.2.2 Sub-Theme 2.2: Revenge at the hands of the other.

This sub-theme involves an act of revenge that is indirect and not carried out by the avenger. Two of the participants explained revenge fantasies that formed this sub-theme, though the content of their fantasies differed completely.

The first of these fantasies involves the suicide of the bully. Death is wished upon the bully, but not at the hands of the avenger. Rather, the bully takes his own life because he cannot tolerate the feelings that the avenger stirs in him. This is the revenge fantasy imagined by Participant 2. His drawing shows a tombstone with a date of death. Participant 2 stands beside the tombstone with a smile on his face, uttering the words “Die, Die, Die.” This picture is colourful, with blue sky, green grass and colour on the grave. A Christian cross lies on the soil of the grave. Participant 2 described his fantasy of revenge as shown in his drawing in the following way: “The bully who did hit me, he did die. Then I said, ‘Die, die, die’”; “He jumped off a mountain”. When asked what prompted the bully to jump off the mountain, Participant 2 responded, “I did make him angry”; “I did gwara⁴ him.”

The second of these fantasies involves revenge through the wrath of God. It encompasses an act of revenge that is not carried out by the avenger and is the only revenge fantasy that does not involve the death of the bully. Instead, revenge is taken on the bully in the form of punishment from God. This punishment involves the bully experiencing what he has put his victim through, at the hands of God. Participant 4 drew a picture of his bully on top of him, holding him in a threatening way, while Participant 4 shouts “Stop bullying me!” The picture shows a smiling sun wearing sunglasses and clouds above the scene of violence below. Participant 4 described his picture of revenge: “Eish⁵! I wish just God could punish him”; “If something could happen, I wish God could, what do you call, could eh, give him what he was

⁴ “Gwara” refers to a kind of African dance known as “stanky leg”.

⁵ A South African exclamation used to express a range of emotions such as surprise, frustration or happiness.

doing to me.” He elaborated on this further, to provide a clearer picture of what he meant by ‘punishment’. He described a situation in which God ensures that the bully is prevented from carrying out his usual activities if he is violent and is then punished by his school and teacher for his behaviour. He explained, “But maybe eh God, maybe someone, maybe that is suspending you. Maybe ehm, maybe God punish you and then after, isn’t he beat me neh? Then after God punish him after he hit me, after he doesn’t even do the homework, after when he go back to class neh, the teacher say bring me, you must do your homework. After he doesn’t do his homework after the teacher say, she shout at him and after they beat him.” Participant 4 not only imagined that the bully was overtly punished for his actions, he also imagined the bully truly understanding what he had done to him and empathising. He elaborated further on his picture by claiming, “Also he must feel it in his heart what he was doing to me.”

4.4.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Revenge on the avenger.

The revenge fantasies of two of the participants ended with them being killed. This sub-theme explores revenge scenarios that end in the death of the avenger. Participant 1’s picture illustrated a monster eating him after he had pushed his bully into lava, then a much larger monster with big teeth eating the first monster once it had eaten him. Participant 1 described being eaten by monsters as a consequence of him murdering his bully. When asked about his drawing and the reasons why the monsters had eaten him, he explained that it was “Because I pushed him into the lava.”

Participant 3’s picture depicted him floating in the air as an angel. When describing his picture, Participant 3 explained that his revenge scenario culminated in the murder of him, the avenger, by the friends of the bully he had murdered. He elaborated on this and explained that his revenge scenario involved his bully being doomed to hell, whereas he was sent to heaven and was then able to visit his bully in hell and taunt him, as he had become an angel. “Then I

throw him with a knife, and then he go to hell and then I go to Jesus cause he killed me too. And then I fly to hell, then I see him and I laughed.”

4.4.3 Theme 3: Anticipated outcome of revenge.

The final picture involved what the participants thought the outcome of their revenge enactments would be. The children were asked to draw a picture depicting how they would feel or what they would do if the revenge scenario in the previous picture had happened. The following sub-themes emerged. Please refer to Appendix 6 to view the art works produced by the participants.

4.4.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Self.

Following the enactment of revenge, the participants were asked to draw and then describe anticipated effects or changes following the revenge on their bullies. This sub-theme comprises an emotional and self-focused component of the participant responses, with the majority of participant responses relating to an improved emotional state.

Participant 2 drew a picture where he was wearing ice skates, smiling and standing in the middle of a snowfall. He described his feelings following his revenge, “I will be happy when the bully is dead. I will enjoy everything what I wanted.” Participant 3’s drawing depicted him as muscular, smiling and driving a car. When describing his anticipated feelings in the picture, Participant 3 stated, “I will feel happy.” Participant 4’s picture showed God hovering above him and his bully, while he boldly exclaimed “God will punish you,” to his bully. Participant 4 explained the picture, which illustrated a conditional situation where he would not have any involvement with the bully until the bully changed to be a better person: “I was gonna feel happy if God help me to no more play with him until he change to be a good friend.”

Participant 1 drew a picture of himself as very large and central. He had a smile on his face, and there was snow all around him. In the centre of his chest was a large heart that was broken in half, with a skull and crossbones in the middle of it. When explaining his picture, Participant 1 described that his emotional state would improve if his bully died, but that he would be forever changed: “Happy ... ’cause he died,” then “Pimples in my eyes... The heart will the evil in it.” When prompted further, he explained that he would be a “bad guy” if he actually exacted his revenge.

Participant 5’s picture displayed him driving a car with a smile on his face, and the words “I love it!” written boldly across the top of the page. In describing his picture, Participant 5 explained that he would feel different if his bully died and would experience more love towards himself. “Umm, that guy is not swearing my mom, then I can feel different,” and “And love my mom and my own.”

4.4.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Change to environment.

The participants not only imagined increased happiness, they imagined that they would gain material possessions, and more opportunities to do what they wanted, should they be able to carry out their revenge fantasies. This sub-theme involves the imagined external rewards, new opportunities and changes to the participants’ environments or to those around them.

Participant 2, when showing the group his picture, described a scenario that was related to freedom: “When the bully’s away, then I can do anything.” When asked to elaborate, he explained that he would be “Playing around, ice skating in the snow,” if his bully was no longer around. Interestingly, Participant 2 changed his use of words here, from “...when the bully is dead”, to a more euphemistic “When the bully’s away...”

When describing his picture and how things would be different for him if his bully had revenge exacted upon him, Participant 1 described both a change in the weather and a change in his school environment, saying: “It will snow,” and that school would be “Nice.”

Participant 3’s picture depicted material gains, but Participant 3 described a scenario following his revenge in which he not only benefited materially but also gained increased popularity. “I feel happy, umm, with my meisies⁶. And I drive the car. I’m driving the car, and I say, ‘Whatup my mans?’” He elaborated that he would be able to do things without restriction, and without fear of rebuke. Furthermore, the bully would not be constantly on his mind. “If the bully never come back and don’t be in my memories and I can play in the sand because the leader say so and blah.” Interestingly, Participant 3 also used more euphemistic phrasing by describing his bully’s absence, rather than his death “If my bully never come back...”

Participant 5 also described his picture, which illustrated material possessions and a sense of being able to do things that he wanted to do. “I would feel like listening music and riding a Lamborghini.”

Participant 4 described a scenario following the picture that he drew, in which God would watch the bully after Participant 4’s threats of God’s punishment. He described the situation as follows: “You see neh, I write ‘It’s me neh’. Then after it’s that boy the bully. After I say, ‘God will punish you,’ then after he get angry. Then after, I go. Then after, God watch him.” When prompted to elaborate on how things would then be different, he explained, “Umm, I was just gonna play with my own friends until he maybe like um, what do you call it. Maybe like he’s alone neh, and he don’t have friends neh. After I tell him say, ‘You must no more bully me.’ Then after he say he will no more bully me. After we start to be friends.” As can be seen, Participant 4 imagined an alternative scenario to the one that he drew, in which he and the bully ultimately become friends, once the bully had promised to no longer torment him.

⁶ Afrikaans term for “girls”.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the participants who formed a part of the focus group during the study. It also described the participants' responses to the focus group, their fellow participants and the researcher. It contains the participants' accounts of their experiences, which have been grouped into themes and sub-themes, according to patterns identified in what they expressed. These themes are related both to their actual experiences of being bullied and to their imagined revenge on their bullies. The themes include descriptions of the art created by the participants. These themes and sub-themes will be elaborated on in Chapter 5, which contains an analysis and interpretation of the themes from a psychodynamic framework.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

If you spend your time hoping someone will suffer the consequences for what they did to your heart, then you're allowing them to hurt you a second time in your mind.

—Shannon L. Alder, unknown

5.1 Introduction

This study aimed to describe children's fantasies of revenge after their experiences of being bullied. In order to explore this, children were recruited to form part of a focus group and were asked to produce specific drawings and then discuss them. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the focus group data. The results presented in Chapter 4 demonstrate the content of their fantasies of revenge, as well as how they believe their lives would be changed following the enactment of revenge. Past research has not focused on the exact area investigated by this study. In fact, research on the presence and expression of revenge fantasies is limited, and the majority of it has not been recently conducted. Thus, thematic analysis allowed for exploratory data to be generated and discussed. This chapter contains a discussion of the research findings that were analysed in Chapter 4. The analysis resulted in the emergence of three main themes, which contained sub-themes. These themes are interpreted in the present chapter utilising existing literature from a psychodynamic perspective, and an attempt is made to answer the research question that was presented in Chapter 1.

5.2 Comparisons with Past Research

5.2.1 Experience of being bullied.

According to Van der Kolk and McFarlane (1996), exposure to violence challenges an individual's belief in himself or herself as inherently worthy and indestructible, and beliefs about the world as fair and orderly. In particular, trauma situations in which the individual is deliberately degraded, or in which gratuitous violence is inflicted on him or her, are the most likely to influence these beliefs (Eagle & Watts, 2001). A consequence of trauma related to violence is that the individual views himself or herself as powerless and vulnerable and experiences a strong wish for revenge (Mackay, 2002). When the participants described their bullying experiences, a power imbalance emerged from their accounts, in which the bully possessed the power and the victim was powerless.

The first sub-theme, The Bully's Power, demonstrates the tactics used by the bullies to intimidate their victims. The bullies use either coercion or violence in order to maintain a sense of power over their victims. According to Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco (2001), bullying situations typically involve an individual who is stronger and possesses a more dominant personality. This individual intimidates another individual who has a more subservient personality, most often using emotional humiliation to maintain the power imbalance.

What emerged in the focus group was that the children had either been subjected to physical violence at the hands of their bullies or had been sworn at or intimidated by their bullies. This violence and denigration occurred on more than one occasion and was unpredictable. The children, despite some attempts to stop the bullying, had no power to prevent the episodes from happening, and were forced to endure whatever their bullies imposed on them. This experience of being unable to stop or prevent the bullying experiences formed the sub-theme of Powerlessness.

The sense of powerlessness is experienced as unbearable and causes the individual's sense of mastery of the self to become fragmented (Waterston, n.d.). In response to this sense of

powerlessness, the wish for revenge emerges as an ‘ego instinct’, which serves a self-soothing and self-preservative function in the individual (Khantzian & Mack, 1983). When asked to produce drawings that depicted an imagined revenge scenario being carried out on their bullies, the children were immediately able to produce illustrations. This suggests that the children had had thoughts of revenge prior to the focus group, not solely when prompted for the research. Akhtar (2014) explains that revenge, “insofar as it carries the hope – mostly unrealistic – of permanently erasing the trauma one has suffered, also acts as a preserver of the good internal object and defence against the sadness and mourning” (p. 11). In fact, revenge behaviour is used to restore narcissistic equilibrium, not only because it depicts the avenger as powerful, but also because the act of fantasising this revenge provides pleasure to the individual, particularly when the individual fantasises in advance about how the revenge may occur (McClelland, 2010).

Thus, the children may have fantasised about enacting revenge prior to the focus group, as a means of conducting narcissistic repair and for restoring some sense of mastery over situations that were otherwise completely out of their control. According to Homveld (2014), revenge fantasies may serve as a way for the individual to cope with negative affect arising from being bullied and may help to increase the individual’s self-efficacy. The ego is prominent in this process, as the fantasy of revenge is used to place the victim in a position of victorious activity rather than demeaning passivity (Akhtar, 2014).

5.2.2 Manifestations of revenge.

This theme encompasses the content of the revenge that was fantasised and the person at whom the fantasies were directed. The idea of being placed in a position of action is reflected in the sub-theme of Revenge at the Hands of the Avenger. Three of the participants envisaged taking brutal revenge on their bullies by murdering them. Homicidal fantasies are a common

form of revenge fantasy (Crabb, 2000). The murders were violent and ensured that the bullies would not be able to survive what was inflicted on them. The finality of the fantasised revenge was evident and reflected the victims' desire to be in control. Their bullies' fates were now in the hands of them, the new perpetrators, who had all the power in the fantasies. When describing these revenge scenarios, the children showed satisfaction and enjoyment at the idea that they could have the chance to dominate their bullies. They laughed and described this with glee and excitement. According to McClelland (2010), individuals who have been wronged often fantasise about revenge, and the avenger can take pleasure in his or her fantasised revenge as he or she attempts to restore narcissistic equilibrium.

Etts (2008) explains that the desire for revenge can be intense when trauma is deliberately perpetrated on the victim by another. Indeed, at the root of these revenge fantasies is hatred, though other emotions may be present, particularly anger towards the perpetrator (Horowitz, 2007). Vitz and Mango (1997) explain the difference between anger and hatred. Anger is seen as a psychologically appropriate, and immediate, emotional and behavioural response to an actual or perceived attack. In comparison, hatred arises from anger that is not released, and instead festers and grows. Horowitz (2007) claims that fantasising about revenge allows the victim to assume a position of control and to be in power again, with the result that the victim is able to feel good again. Goldberg (2004) supports this notion and explains that fantasies of revenge act as a defence against feelings of helplessness and bring hope of spiteful victory to the avenger. She further explains that revenge fantasies allow for the avenger to be in control and to end the story in whatever way he or she wishes – including the death of the perpetrator.

Not only did some of the participants in this study imagine the deaths of their perpetrators, two participants imagined that they themselves were killed after they had killed their bullies. This was evident in the sub-theme *Revenge on the Avenger*. Etts (2008) provides a possible explanation as to why the children may have chosen to end their revenge fantasies with their

own deaths. He explains that victimised children are likely to focus their desire for revenge and feelings of anger at themselves. Following a bullying experience, the victim may experience strong self-disgust over allowing himself to be placed in such a position of vulnerability (Horowitz, 2007). It is more likely that children will blame themselves and will thus direct their anger at themselves (van der Kolk, 1989). Consequently, the participants may have felt that they also deserved die in their fantasies, because of the role that they felt they had played in the bullying episodes.

Despite inflicting the punishment of death on himself, Participant 3 ends his revenge scenario victorious, as he is still able to visit his bully in hell, from his position in heaven, and taunt the bully in his fate. Goldberg (2004) explains that in revenge fantasies “You’re powerful, righteous, and the number-one winner all the time” (p. 6). Thus, Participant 3 is still able to emerge as the champion of his fantasy, as his ultimate reward is becoming an angel in heaven, whereas his bully is doomed to suffer in hell. This notion is supported by Horowitz (2007), who explains that the revenge fantasy allows the avenger to “experience pleasure at imagining the suffering of the target and pride at being on the side of some spiritual primal justice” (p. 25). However, Knoll (2010) believes that these fantasies make a false promise of restoring the shattered ego through a “temporary, though false, sense of restored control and self-coherence” (p. 90).

In these revenge fantasies, the bully is seen as an enemy who deserves to be on the receiving end of the victim’s unforgiving and ruthless rage. No mercy is taken on the bully. From an object relations perspective, the avenger/victim is engaging in projection and splitting, whereby the undesirable aspects of the avenger are split off from him or her and projected onto the bully, who also contains the projected rage of the avenger (LaFarge, 2006). Thus, the avenger is able to imagine guilt-free revenge, as the avenger is not to blame, and the bully should be punished.

The idea of revenge being carried out but not by the avenger, which thus renders the revenge indirect, is reflected in the sub-theme of Revenge at the Hands of the Other. The concept of revenge being exacted on the bully, but not by the victim himself, is represented in the revenge fantasy where the bully commits suicide. This revenge fantasy involves the bully becoming enraged by the victim who mocks him with a dance, and the bully then takes his own life by leaping off a mountain. There are several possible explanations for a fantasy of this nature. It is possible that this revenge fantasy involves the avenger distancing himself from the act of punishing the bully, by not being responsible for the actual act of suicide, and for being unable to control the bully's act of killing himself. He wants his bully dead, but not by his own hand. This could be a form of 'symbolic' revenge, which McClelland (2010) describes as follows: "the destructive and harmful intent of the avenger is fully present in his action and realised through it, but in a sublimated form" (p. 222). Thus, the bully dies, but by killing himself.

Alternatively, this revenge fantasy could represent projective identification, whereby the bully acts out what the avenger wishes he could do to himself. Projective identification is an unconscious process in which parts of the self are split off and attributed to another. Segal (1974) explains why an individual may use this process as follows:

Projective identification has manifold aims: it may be directed toward the ideal object to avoid separation, or it may be directed toward the bad object to gain control of the source of danger. Various parts of the self may be projected, with various aims: bad parts of the self may be projected in order to get rid of them as well as to attack and destroy the object, good parts may be projected to avoid separation or keep them safe from bad things inside or to improve the external object through a kind of primitive projective reparation. (p. 27-28)

In this instance, projective identification may have occurred to gain control of the bully, to project Participant 2's 'bad' parts onto his bully to evacuate them and to destroy the bully. The avenger might wish that the bully experienced excessive shame and guilt about what he did to his victim and cannot live with this knowledge now that he knows what he has done.

White (2004) explains that bullies may appear to have self-esteem that is high, but internally they experience feelings of psychic deadness, as a consequence of constantly repressing shame and guilt. These feelings can result in suicidal ideation and attempts to cope with psychic deadness by engaging in splitting into good or bad. Hastings (2002) found that feelings of shame are integral in suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

As this is a revenge fantasy where the avenger imagines his bully killing himself, projective identification and the victim's shame may offer the most appropriate explanation for a fantasy of this nature. Van Noort (2003) explains that a significant feature of the desire for revenge is the victim's feelings of shame and efforts to hide these feelings. In this fantasy, the victim may experience significant levels of shame, which are intolerable. The victim may then project this shame onto his bully, in an attempt to rid himself of this, as well as to force the bully to experience what he should in response to his misdeeds (in the victim's eyes). The bully is in essence attacked by this shame, and, although it seems to be an angry response (as described by Participant 2), this anger is used to mask the shame. The shame becomes unbearable, so the bully does what he can to rid himself of it – he kills himself.

A revenge fantasy where revenge is taken on the bully, not by the victim, but by God, is represented in the revenge fantasy where the wrath of God is exacted. Religion was dismissed by Freud and has not typically featured in psychodynamic literature. Thus, both the religious and psychodynamic aspects of this fantasy will be explored. The Bible states:

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay”, says the Lord (Romans 12:17-21, The New King James Version).

Participant 4 brought up God as a punisher several times during the focus group when describing his revenge fantasy and directed this toward his fellow group members on occasion, when he felt ridiculed by them. His faith allows him to give up his possible desire to exact vengeance, as he is able to leave it to God to make reparations on his behalf. In this way, Participant 4 is able to take the higher ground and maintain a sense of moral power, as he does not resort to the violence or aggression shown to him by his bully.

There are two possible psychodynamic explanations for what has occurred in this fantasy, though no current literature exists to explain it. The first utilises the work of Freud (1949). Freud proposed that an individual’s personality is comprised of the id, the ego and the superego. The id is primitive, and operates on instinct, thus is impulsive and unconscious. The ego is the decision-making aspect of an individual’s personality and attempts to mediate between the impulsive id and the external world. The superego acts as the rule enforcer and is comprised of the values and morals found in society. It aims to control the id. This fantasy possibly represents a dominant superego, where Participant 4 relinquishes control to his superego, which follows the laws of society. Instead of him taking revenge for wrongs done to him, Participant 4 leaves it in the hands of the ‘correct’ people to take charge through God’s influence. These people include teachers who punish the bully for incomplete work, and the bully’s friends abandoning him because of his cruel acts. God could almost be represented here as the superego.

The second possible psychodynamic explanation for this kind of revenge fantasy involves defence mechanisms. In this fantasy, the victim is not responsible for exacting vengeance.

However, the victim uses the defence mechanisms of splitting and projection in fantasising his revenge. Here, the protective aspects of him, which are incapable of protecting him in his own body, are split off and projected onto God. God then acts on his behalf, by influencing the people in Participant 4's external world to help him. Participant 4 also uses the defence mechanism of sublimation. This defence mechanism involves taking intentions that are destructive and placing them into constructive activity or places. Thus, the narcissistic damage is displaced, but in a way that is socially acceptable (McClelland, 2010). In other words, Participant 4's inappropriate aggressive response is sublimated to his religion and belief that God will punish his bully for him. According to Carlin and Capps (2015), Freud "suggests that religious ideas may offer a valuable sublimation, but essentially because the ultimate root of religion is our infantile helplessness" (p. 20).

Both of these fantasies, the suicide of the bully and the wrath of God, represent the use of the defence mechanisms of splitting and projection. However, Participant 2's suicidal revenge fantasy uses an additional defence mechanism of projective identification and shame, whereas Participant 4's religious revenge fantasy uses sublimation.

Yet another sub-theme that emerged from the children's expressions of revenge was the sub-theme Revenge on the Avenger. This sub-theme reflects punishment that is inflicted on the avenger following his revenge on his bully. Participant 1 is eaten by a monster that is eaten by another monster, once he pushes his bully off a platform into lava. Participant 3 is murdered by the dead bully's friends, who have come to avenge his death. This extreme punishment that is inflicted on the avengers in their fantasies suggests that they possess superegos that are dominant. Their superegos suppress their ids, which have caused them to act out their aggression in their fantasies. Their superegos then impose harsh penalties – the death penalty – similar to how a murderer in the real world would receive punishment. This suggests that,

despite only fantasising how they would carry out their revenge, the participants have a strong understanding of right and wrong according to society's morals.

Gäbler and Maercker (2011) explain that individuals who have been traumatised and consequently grapple with intense revenge fantasies may concurrently experience feelings of guilt and shame about these fantasies, and their loss of control. Seebauer, Froß, Dubaschny, Schönberger, and Jacob (2014) support this, further explaining that the guilt and shame evoked by revenge fantasies can lead to social withdrawal. Revenge fantasies can also include anger toward the self, and may result in suicide (Horowitz, 2007). In order to deal with these overwhelming emotions, particularly in situations where sublimation is not possible, repression often occurs. This is a defence mechanism whereby information or feelings that are upsetting are moved from the conscious to the unconscious (Bornstein, 2018). Carveth (2001) explains that this leads to “moral masochism”, or various kinds of self-punishment, because of “the sadistic superego that reflects id aggression away from the object world and against the ego” (p. 9). Thus, it is possible that the participants who have fantasised about revenge that results in their own deaths may have punitive superegos that attempt to deal with their overwhelming emotions of shame, guilt and anger by directing it inwards. Thus, as they have inflicted death on another, they too must be killed.

5.2.3 Anticipated outcome of revenge.

This theme reflects what the participants thought would happen to them if they carried out their imagined revenge scenarios. The participants envisaged changes both to their selves and to their immediate surroundings. The changes to the self involved improvements to wellbeing, positive affect and increased independence. It is possible that fantasising about taking revenge on their bullies allowed for the narcissistic rage at their injuries to be expelled onto their bullies in fantasy, thus allowing for their egos to become stabilised and equilibrium to be restored.

Consequently, they would feel better as their narcissistic injury had been repaired through their vengeance.

Waterston (n.d.) explains that the desire to exact revenge arises from narcissistic injury, which results in a range of difficult-to-tolerate emotions that flood the ego, particularly a feeling of powerlessness. This leads to the individual feeling fragmented. However, fantasising about revenge mobilises “the primary aggressive drives to control the narcissistic core self” (p. 3) and asserts the individual’s control. In this way, the individual self-soothes and his ego is once again stabilised.

It is also possible that through the obliteration of the bad object (the bully) in their revenge fantasies, the participants were able to maintain their good internal objects that had been split off from the bad. Vitz and Mango (1997) describe how the individual preserves the experience of self as ‘good’ by projecting ‘bad’ aspects of the self onto the other. Consequently, the good internal object is maintained, and the individual is able to experience positive affect.

Goldberg (2004) explains that revenge fantasies aid in constructive psychological function. These fantasies direct self-destructive urges away from the self, thus moving away from narcissistic self-involvement through awareness that another person exists to blame. She claims that directing rage at a perpetrator rather than at the self is a psychologically healthy response, and the desire for revenge therefore stabilises the psyche.

The research suggests that the act of imagining revenge against their perpetrators allowed the participants to maintain some sense of control and take back an element of power. They were able to direct their rage externally toward the other, allowing for their egos to become balanced as a sense of self was restored.

However, Participant 1 not only imagined a generally improved state; he imagined that he would be different, or ‘bad’, following his vengeance. This suggests that his dominant superego punished him in turn for inflicting punishment on another – a kind of self-imposed justice. For

committing a wrongful act, despite its being against another who has tormented him, he too is now bad.

This explanation does not seem to explain this outcome of Participant 1's revenge fantasy sufficiently. What may explain his response is the notion of identification with the aggressor. Freud (1937) defined this as a powerful defence of the ego where "by impersonating the aggressor, assuming his attributes or imitating his aggression, the child transforms himself into the person who makes the threat" (p. 128). The child splits off a portion of the pain he experiences by identifying with his aggressor, but in doing so begins to experience himself as destructive, and even evil (Böhm & Kaplan, 2011). As a response to his victimisation, it is possible that Participant 1 identified with his bully. He was able to imagine carrying out revenge on his bully, as he was now the perpetrator. However, in doing so, he was also now 'bad', because he was like his bully.

5.3 Conclusion

The topic of revenge fantasies in response to trauma from bullying is one that has not received much attention in research. This chapter presented an interpretation of the research findings according to various psychodynamic approaches. As this is an exploratory study, it was not sufficient to choose one specific psychodynamic approach to explain the revenge fantasies, as this would not have captured the complexity of the fantasies. Thus, various ideas were presented as possible hypotheses for the different themes and sub-themes that emerged in the analysis. The interpretation was not exhaustive, as the current research would not allow for all the possible explanations that may be offered. The content of the revenge fantasies, the experiences of the participant/victims and the imagined consequences of the exacted fantasies

were interpreted and discussed. The following chapter will present the final conclusions, limitations of the research and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 6 – Limitations and Recommendations

The problem with revenge is that it never evens the score. It ties both the injured and the injurer to an escalator of pain. Both are stuck on the escalator as long as parity is demanded, and the escalator never stops.

—Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive & Forget*

6.1 Introduction

Fantasies of revenge can take many forms, from homicidal to symbolic imaginings. They represent the imaginer's attempts to create a story that can be told out of an experience of trauma, shame and anger. They signify efforts to engage in narcissistic repair, and to restore the ego to its normal state, by allowing the individual who has them the opportunity to rid himself of his feelings of powerlessness and regain a sense of control.

This study explored existing literature regarding bullying victimisation in South Africa. It looked at the incidence and occurrence of this phenomenon in the school context. It examined the effects of trauma on the individual, particularly the development of fantasies associated with the desire for revenge. The functions of revenge fantasies were explored, though no consensus has been reached by researchers as to the exact consequences of this desire.

The research explored revenge fantasies expressed by five children who drew then discussed their experiences in a focus group. The data collected from the group, which consisted of transcriptions of the discussions, was analysed using thematic analysis, and themes were identified. These were then interpreted using psychodynamic theory and existing literature on the phenomenon of revenge fantasies. Although existing literature did not directly apply to the data, psychodynamic theory allowed for inferences to be made about the participants' experiences and their revenge fantasies.

The drawing of the participants' experiences seemed to offer several advantages for the data collection process. Firstly, it allowed the participants to express their thoughts on paper, prior to needing to express them to the group. This provided a chance for them to organise their thoughts without distraction or comments from the others. Secondly, insight was provided into their lives and concerns, particularly into situations that may have been too embarrassing or distressing to describe verbally (such as the tears some of the children drew on their faces in the pictures of their bullying experiences). Finally, the experience of both drawing then discussing their revenge fantasies seemed to act advantageously for the participants, as they were afforded the chance to symbolically punish their bullies for their misdeeds.

Talking about their bullying incidents also seemed valuable, as the children were able to discuss their trauma with other individuals who were experiencing similar situations. This sharing of experiences seemed to support the participants in realising that they were not alone in being bullied. Sharing their wishes for revenge may have helped the participants to realise that they were not strange for wanting to inflict punishment on their perpetrators.

This chapter represents the final aspect of the present research. Some of the limitations of the study are examined and recommendations for future research are made.

6.2 Limitations

6.2.1 Generalisability

The generalisability of the data presented in this study is limited for several reasons. A purposive sample of five participants was selected by social workers at the Home to participate in the research, as they were being victimised by bullies at school. Thus, the experiences described by the participants cannot be said to represent the larger population of children who are bullied, as a random sample was not selected and only a small number of children

participated. Consequently, this raises the question of transferability of the findings of the study, which refers to whether the findings can be applied to other people or settings (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2010).

The children have been removed from their familial homes due to family difficulties, and currently reside at the Home. Their living circumstances at the Home are very different to 'typical' households, as one house parent cares for several children in each house, and the children are housed with other children that they are not related to. Thus, there may be other factors that affect the children's experiences of being bullied, and their desire for revenge, that may not influence children who still live at home. The children come from different cultural backgrounds, so they possess their own cultural beliefs and ways of coping. This may have affected how they responded to their victimisation, as well as their beliefs about revenge. Thus, this research cannot be generalised to all children who are being bullied in South Africa.

6.2.2 Focus Group

The focus group itself offered challenges. The group consisted of boys between the ages of 11 and 13. It was difficult to elicit detailed descriptions from all of the participants, and the participants often interrupted, or spoke over each other. The topic under study was a sensitive one, which may have fostered a reluctance to discuss any emotionally distressing content in front of the other boys, or to reveal too much for fear of judgment or repercussion. It is also possible that some of the responses were contrived in an attempt to 'fit in' with the group.

6.2.3 Language

Although the participants were fluent in English, it was not their first language. This may have affected the amount of detail they were able to provide, as they did not have words to explain certain concepts.

6.2.4 Time

This is a complex phenomenon to explore, and the readiness with which the participants were able to draw and discuss their revenge fantasies suggests that a two-hour focus group was not enough time to explore their fantasies sufficiently. A two-hour period in one session was also too long, even with breaks, as the participants became restless and their attention waned.

6.3 Recommendations and Clinical Implications

Little research has been conducted on the presence of revenge fantasies, but there is even less available research on the presence of those related to bullying trauma, and none specifically related to the South African context. As this was an exploratory study, it intended to investigate this phenomenon in order to provide increased understanding of the topic under study. This study revealed that all of the participants experienced revenge fantasies in varying forms, with the majority of them containing violent content. It is recommended that further research be conducted with more participants in order to provide a more representative picture of revenge fantasies and enrich the findings of this study. This research could be quantitative in nature so as to provide a more large-scale idea of how many children experience revenge fantasies, what the content of these is, and who they are directed towards. Further qualitative research could provide case study examples of the children under study to provide a much more in-depth exploration of their fantasies of revenge.

It is not clear whether revenge fantasies are beneficial or detrimental to the individual who experiences them. Longitudinal studies which look at the long-term effects of revenge fantasies that are not resolved may provide some insight into this and into the existing Cycle of Violence theory (Rees, Thorpe, Tol, Fonseca, & Silove, 2015).

The art works produced by the participants were not interpreted in this study and were merely used to stimulate discussion and provide more detailed description of the fantasies. Future research could possibly interpret such art works, in order to create a more in-depth analysis of revenge fantasies.

Bullying is a phenomenon that is rife in South African schools, and victims of bullying are often left feeling isolated, stigmatised and unable to cope. Revenge fantasies may serve as a way of coping with this trauma, particularly when the trauma involves degradation and humiliation. The findings of this research indicated that all the participants had fantasies of revenge. Although it is not possible to assume that every child who has been bullied has imagined exacting some form of revenge on their bullies, it is possible that bullying may bring about a desire for retribution in those who experience it.

This may have important therapeutic implications. Encouraging patients to express their desire for revenge may afford them the opportunity to regain a sense of power and control over their situations, albeit symbolically. This may aid in healing, as it bolsters the ego and contributes to increasing self-esteem, by providing an opportunity not to be a victim. Working through revenge fantasies may also provide a way of making sense of what patients experience and normalising their reactions to it.

In addition, this may reduce the likelihood of developing future pathology or retaliatory behaviours. One such retaliatory behaviour is reactive aggression. In a study conducted by Orobio de Castro, Verhulp, and Runions (2012), aggressive responses in boys were frequently motivated by revenge, which they took pride in, as it was justified as the correct response to perceived slights and provocation. According to Kivivuori, Savolainen, and Aaltonen (2016), revenge acts as a motivator for many serious crimes that are committed and has the ability to initiate cycles of violence. Therefore, by addressing revenge fantasies in a therapeutic setting,

the client may be assisted to work through them in a healthy way, which will reduce or eliminate the need to act them out.

It has been suggested that people who fantasise about revenge have difficulty trusting others who try to help them, and experience self-disgust over allowing themselves to be violated (Horowitz, 2007). Thus, it is important to understand the role that revenge fantasies hold for the individual in therapy, as this may have additional clinical implications in allowing the clinician to understand splitting, projection, transference and counter-transference issues that occur in psychotherapy.

6.4 Conclusion

By exploring bullying and revenge fantasies from a psychodynamic perspective, both the bullying experiences and the imagined retaliation of the participants were brought to light. This framework made it possible to hypothesise what the effects of bullying on the participants had been and made it possible to examine the role that the revenge fantasies might have played in helping the participants to cope with the trauma they were being or had been subjected to. It is clear that more research needs to be conducted in order to understand the connection between being bullied and fantasising about revenge, as well as the function that revenge fantasies perform in the individual. This research would be valuable in assisting individuals to cope with bullying victimisation, and in helping them to develop adaptive coping defence mechanisms. It may even provide further understanding of why people who are traumatised go on to traumatise others, as in the Cycle of Violence theory.

What is clear from the research is that none of the children who participated had not possessed the desire to exact revenge in some form. This is hence a potentially pertinent phenomenon that needs to be investigated further in order to be understood.

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Appendix 1 – Ethical Approval



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Committee

31 March 2017

Dear Ms Fulbeck

Project: Children's expressions of revenge fantasies in response to trauma from bullying: A psychodynamic
Supervisor: Dr L Blokland
Department: Psychology
Reference number: 25309316(GW20170338HS)

Thank you for the application that was submitted for ethical consideration.

I am pleased to inform you that the above application was **approved** by the **Research Ethics Committee** on 30 March 2017. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

Prof Maxi Schoeman
Deputy Dean: Postgraduate Studies and Ethics
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail:tracey.andrew@up.ac.za

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof MME Schoeman (Deputy Dean); Prof KL Harris; Dr L Blokland; Dr R Fassell; Ms KT Govinder; Dr E Johnson; Dr C Panebianco; Dr C Puttergill; Dr D Reyburn; Prof GM Spies; Prof E Taljard; Ms B Tsebe; Dr E van der Klashorst; Mr V Sithole

Appendix 2 – Research Site Permission Letter



Jakaranda

Kinder en Gesinsorg Maatskappy
Child and Family Care Centre

Reg. Kinderhuis/Children's Home

Privaatsak/Private Bag x11
Lynn East
0039
Tallha Kumi str
East Lynne

Tel: (012) 800-4700
Faks/Fax: (012) 800-1443
www.jakarandachildren.co.za

NPO Reg. nr 001-649NPO
Art.21 Mpy./ Sec. 21 Co. Reg nr: 2001/016848/08

23 October 2017

To whom it may concern,

Jakaranda Child and Youth Care Centre in Pretoria hereby gives Rebecca Fulbeck, student at University of Pretoria, (Student Number: 25309316) permission to conduct her Master degree research project called: "Children's Expressions of Revenge Fantasies in Response to Trauma from Bullying." at the above mentioned facility.

Kind regards

Mr. M. Erwee
Executive Director – Jakaranda Children's Home

Bank Besonderhede/Bank Details: ABSA – Derdepoort Tak kode/Branch Code : 335245 Rek. No./Account No. : 1430140724

Beskermerhere/Patrons: Pieter Koen, Beskermer vroue/Patrons : Rinell Day

Direkteure/Directors: (Voorsitter/Chairman) Ds./Rev. JH van Loggerenberg, Adv. SA Visser, Ds./Rev. DH Janse v. Rensburg, Mnr./Mr. GL Botha, Mnr./Mr. O Truter, Mnr./Mr. LS de Kock, (Uitvoerende Direkteur/Executive Director) Mnr./Mr. M Erwee

Appendix 3 – Assent Form



Faculty of Humanities
Department of Psychology

CONFIDENTIAL

Researcher: Rebecca Fulbeck

I am doing a research study about **children’s feelings and thoughts about bullying in schools**. It will ask about **thoughts of revenge**. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to **attend one focus group with me, Rebecca, and some other children at a time that will be discussed**.

There are some things about this study you should know. These are: you will be asked to draw pictures and talk about them to the group which will only have 5-8 other children. I might ask you some extra questions about the pictures. I will audio record the group so that I can write down what everyone says for my research. Some of the things you talk about may make you uncomfortable or upset, but I want you to remember that you can choose what you want to talk about. You don’t have to talk about anything that makes you uncomfortable. I am here to answer your questions along the way, if you have any.

By participating in this study, I believe that **you will have the chance to share your thoughts and feelings with other children who may learn from you or feel supported because they have the chance to talk to others**.

When I am finished with this study, I will write a report about what was learned. This report will not include your name or that you were in the study. There will be no way for people to know who you are. You will also be able to read the report if you would like to. The recordings, art and all the other information will be put somewhere safe at the University of Pretoria where no one can see them.

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Departement Sielkunde
Lefapha la Bomotheo
Kgoro ya Saekolotši



You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too. It won't change a thing. Your parents also know about the study. If the group brings up feelings for you that are difficult to deal with, you can also let me know and I will organise for you to see a counsellor at Jakaranda Children's Home to talk about it.

If you decide you want to be in this study, please sign your name.

I,, want to be in this research study.

.....
(Sign your name here) (Date)

Rebecca Fulbeck
Researcher
Masters Counselling Psychology (Student)
Tel: 012 333 0266
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Appendix 4 – Consent Form



Faculty of Humanities
Department of Psychology

CONFIDENTIAL

Letter of information /consent

Research conducted by: Rebecca Fulbeck

Dear Parent/Guardian,

The aim of this letter is to inform you of a study I want to invite your child to participate in. I also ask you to give your consent below if you agree to your child participating in this study. The following information has been compiled to provide you with information about the research study I would like your child to take part in. It is important that you are fully aware of the research process so that you can make an informed decision. Please feel free to ask any questions you might have, or to indicate if you have any concerns.

Purpose of the study:

This study aims to explore children's wishes for revenge after experiencing bullying in the school environment. It aims to understand what the children have imagined doing in their revenge fantasy, and who they have imagined doing it to. This information will be collected during a focus group, which will be guided by me. Bullying is a common occurrence in schools, and can cause children to feel traumatised. There are potential short-term and long-term consequences of this, including difficulties with school learning and relationships. Thus, it is important to understand how children see bullying and what their revenge fantasies are so that future interventions are more effective. In addition, this information might contribute towards a better understanding of how to approach therapy with other children who are bullied.

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Departement Sielkunde
Lefapha la Bomo
Kgoro ya Saekolotši

Procedures:

Once you have given permission and your child has given assent, we will discuss when your child is able to attend the focus group. The research process will require your child to attend one focus group session that will be approximately 1.5 – 2 hours long. In this session, your child will be asked to draw a picture related to bullying. Your child will also be asked to explain what he/she has drawn, will talk about the picture with the group and may be required to answer some additional questions. Your child will be free to talk about anything that he/she is comfortable with, and will be able to choose to not talk about anything he/she is not comfortable with.

It may be decided that counselling will need to continue beyond this time, and your child will be referred to a counsellor at Jakaranda Children's Home if this is necessary. Counselling will not be part of the research process

Please take note of the following:

- The focus group will be audio-recorded with both your consent and your child's assent.
- The focus group conversations will be analysed and themes will be extracted from each set of information. Your child will be able to see the interview summaries if he/she wishes.
- The results of the study will be reported on in the form of a dissertation and an academic article.
- Should the focus group bring up feelings that your child finds difficult to deal with, the option of seeing a counsellor at Itsoseng will be provided to you for your child to participate.

Risks:

While it is possible that the process may bring up some distress when the child is reminded of the incidents he/she describes, no other risks or discomforts are foreseen. However should you feel the need to discuss anything further you are welcome to contact me or the supervisor of the study, Dr. Linda Blokland.

Your child has the right not to participate in this study. Furthermore, should your child wish to withdraw at any stage, he/she may do so without consequence.

If you have any questions, suggestions or requests, please feel free to contact me.
Thank you for considering allowing your child to be a part of this research process.

Consent:

I give consent for my child to participate in the study as it is outlined above.

Name _____ Date _____

Signature _____

Rebecca Fulbeck
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Appendix 5 – Focus Group Interview Schedule



Faculty of Humanities
Department of Psychology

Interview schedule and focus group process

Please note that this schedule only serves to provide a brief idea of the types of questions that may be asked in the focus group session. The questions asked will depend on what the participants say and do and will be aligned with the research process. They will only be asked to acquire a more detailed, rich description of what has been drawn and brought up in the group.

1. Introduction

Participants introduce selves.

Ice breaker activity: Introduction to art materials and warm up exercise using materials

- Materials: A4 sheets of paper; pencils; erasers
- Warm-up activity: Collaborative Drawing

Each participant is given a sheet of paper and a pencil. They are instructed to fold the piece of paper into four sections. Each participant then draws a head on the first section. The piece of paper is passed to the person on their left, who then needs to draw a torso (without being able to see the head, as the paper is folded in such a way as to prevent this). The paper is then passed to the next person, who draws the legs, and the next who draws the feet (without seeing the previous drawings). Once the last person has drawn, the paper is unfolded to

reveal a complete figure. Each time a person draws, they are only given 30 seconds to complete their section to avoid prolonging the ice-breaker unnecessarily.

2. Establishing ground rules and reason for focus group

Explain to children that the purpose of the focus group is to talk about bullying and their experiences of bullying. Explain confidentiality, and that it is important for the group to feel they can talk. Using a flip chart, encourage group to set ground rules: “What can we all do to make it easier to talk in the group? What should we not do?” (For example, listen when others speak).

Explain right to withdraw, and that they need only share what they want to share.

3. Part 1

Explain use of drawing to encourage participants to think about things and help them to talk about what has happened.

Drawing 1: Please draw an instance where you were bullied at school (or outside of school).

Now, please tell the group about what happened. While you are talking, others may have questions to ask you, but remember that you can choose what to answer.

Question prompts: - What happened?

- Can you tell me more about this person/object/relationship?
- How does/do the person/people in the picture feel?
- If the people in these pictures could speak, what do you think they would be saying?

- Who did you tell?
- Was there anyone else there? Did anyone help you?

4. Part 2

You drew a picture about a time that you were bullied.

Drawing 2: You can either add to or change your picture, or draw a new picture. If you could, in your imagination, what would you do or what would happen to the perpetrator?

OR: Is there someone else who you would like something to happen to because of your bullying?

Draw this.

Now tell the group what you drew.

Question prompts: - Who would this happen to?

- How would it happen?
- How long would it last?
- What would you say to the person/people?

Part 3

You drew a picture about what you would do or what would happen to the perpetrator.

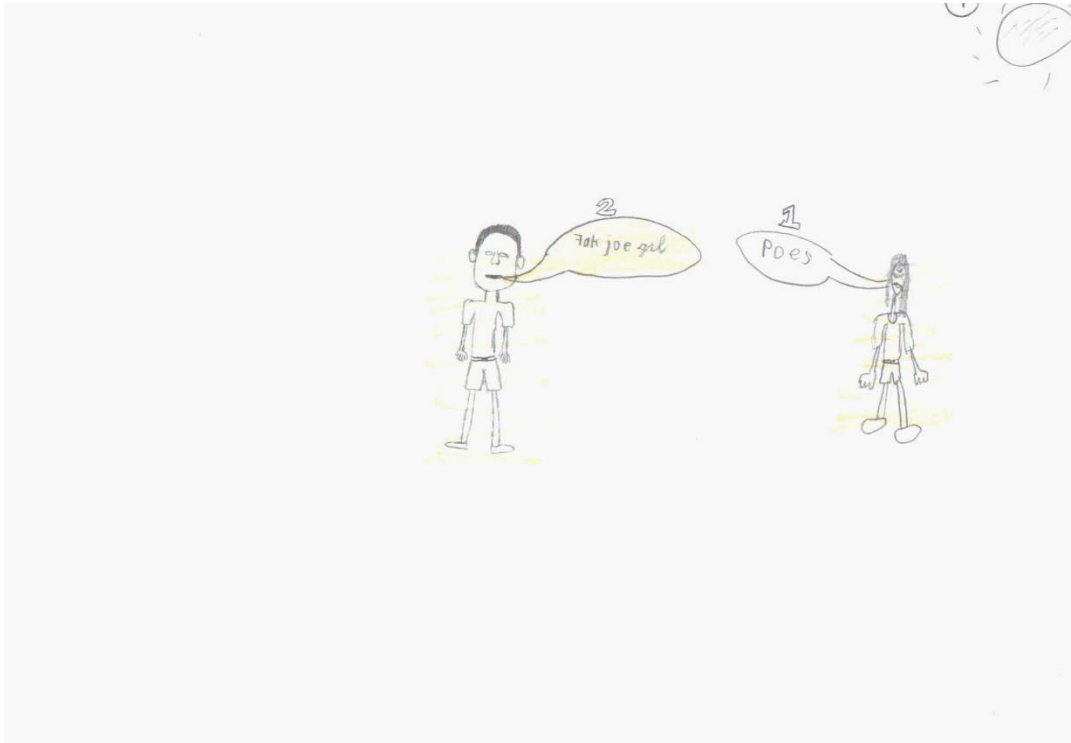
Drawing 3: How would this make you feel? Draw yourself after you have said/done what you wanted to the perpetrator.

Now tell the group about your picture.

Appendix 6 – Participant Drawings

Participant 1

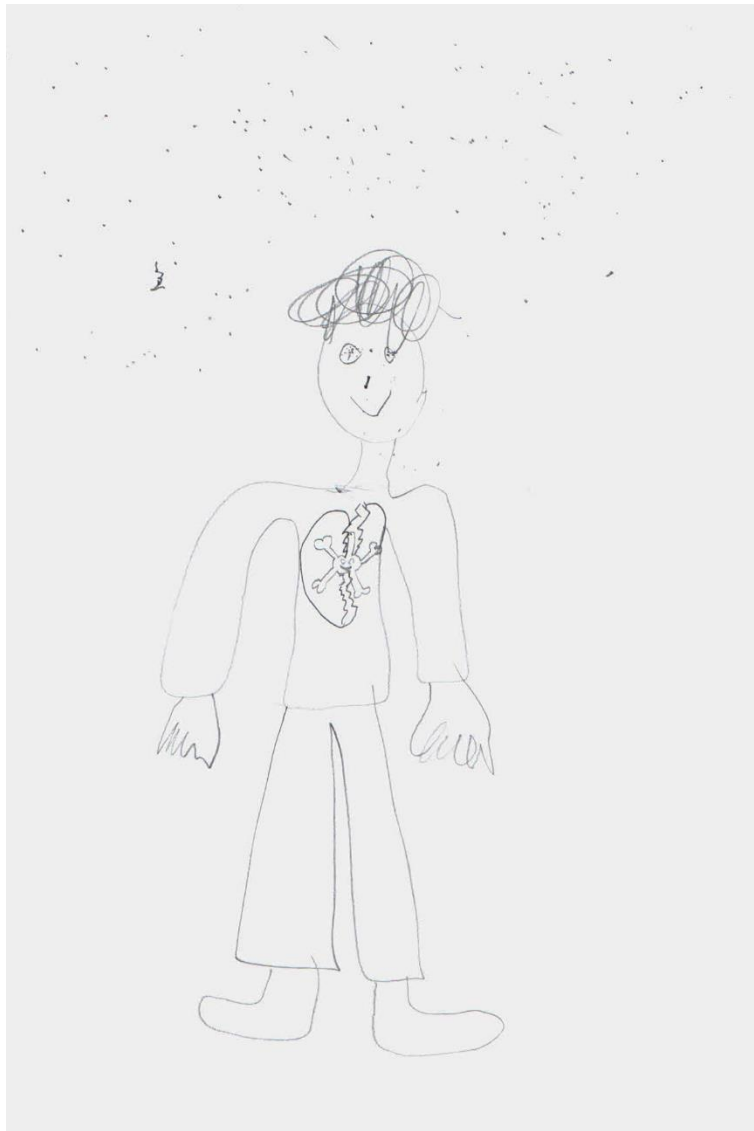
Drawing 1 – Bullying Incident



Drawing 2 – Revenge Fantasy



Drawing 3 – Anticipated Outcome

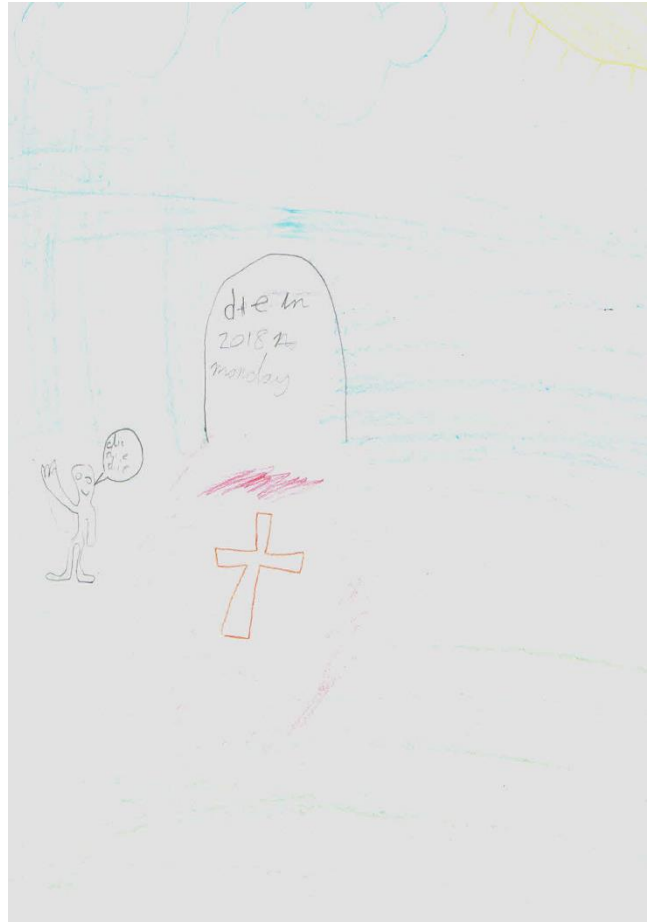


Participant 2

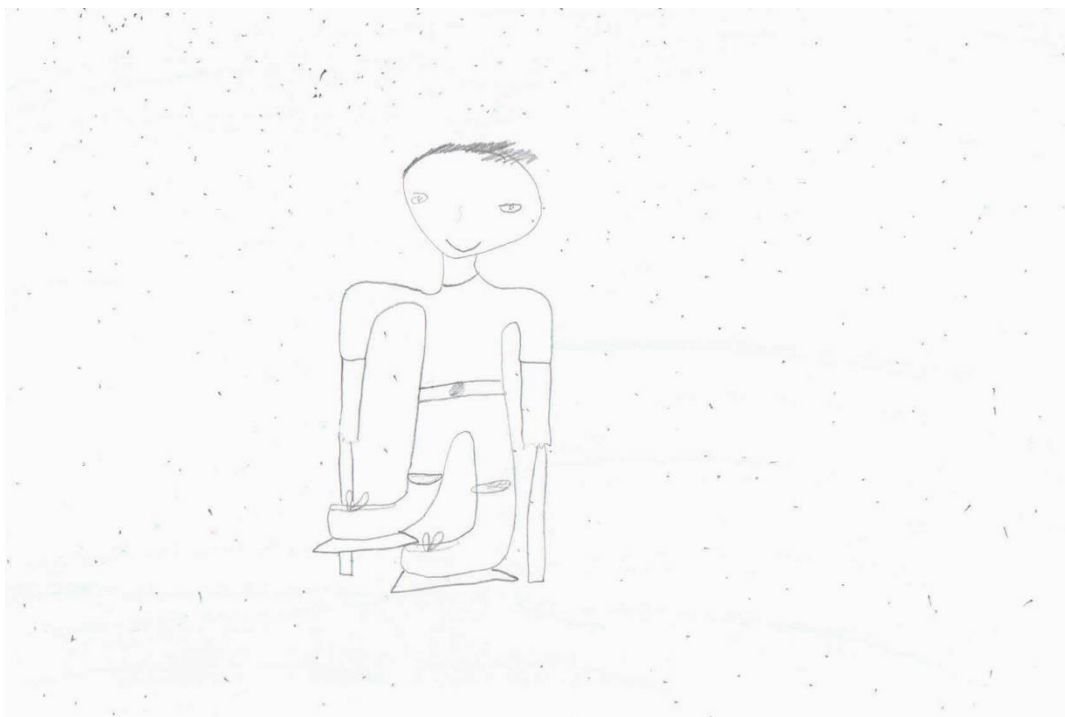
Drawing 1 – Bullying Incident



Drawing 2 – Revenge Fantasy



Drawing 3 – Anticipated Outcome



Participant 3

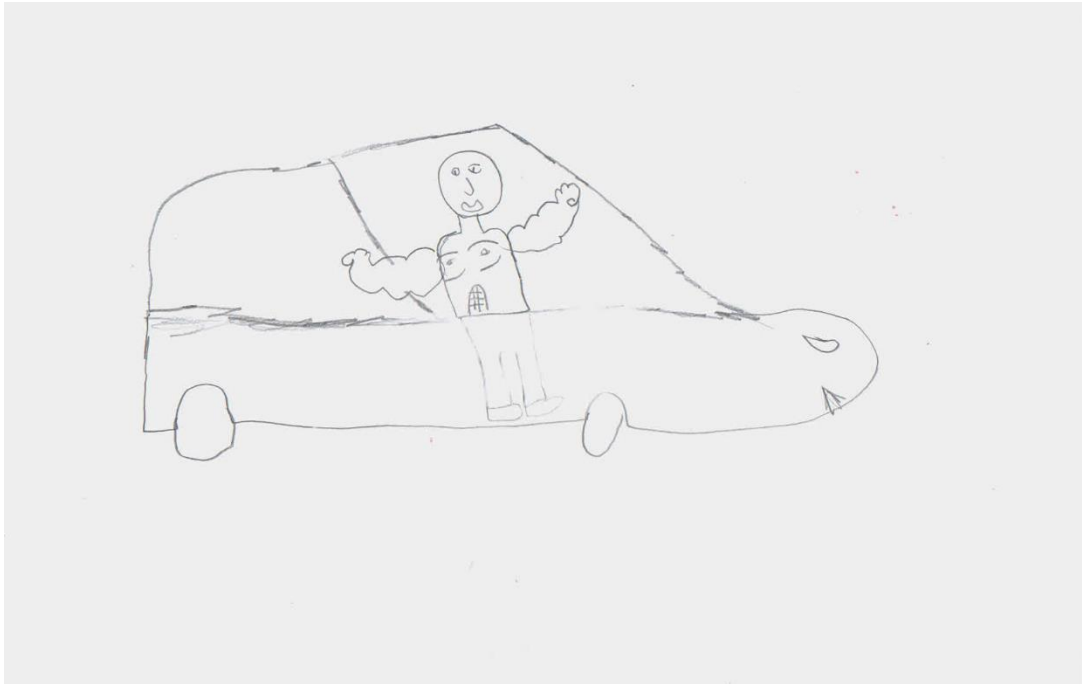
Drawing 1 – Bullying Incident



Drawing 2 – Revenge Fantasy

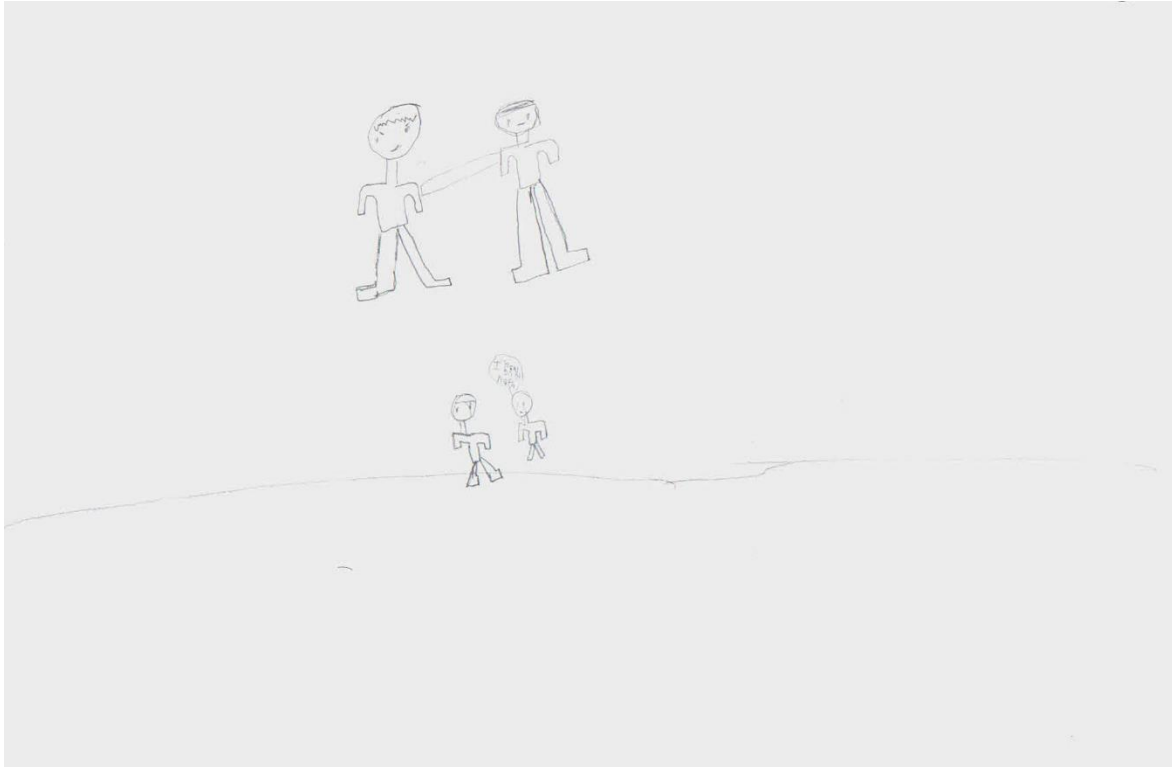


Drawing 3 – Anticipated Outcome

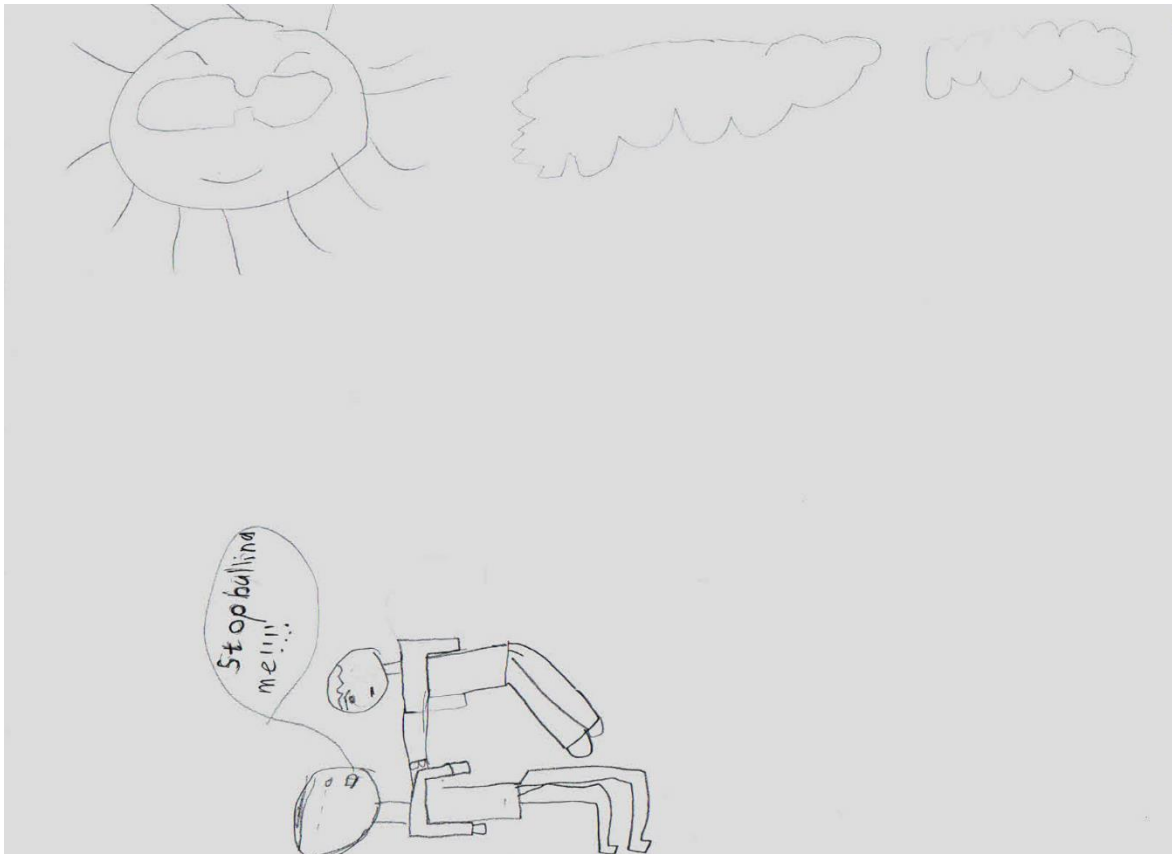


Participant 4

Drawing 1 – Bullying Incident



Drawing 2 – Revenge Fantasy



Drawing 3 – Anticipated Outcome



Participant 5

Drawing 1 – Bullying Incident



Drawing 2 – Revenge Fantasy



Drawing 3 – Anticipated Outcome

