

# Adolescents' views on the power of violence in a remote school

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to explain how adolescents in a rural high school conceptualise school violence. Qualitative data was collected over two, two-day periods (24 hours) through child-centred tasks (drawings, open-ended sentences), informal conversations regarding the given activities, observations

documented as visual data (photographs), a research journal, as well as a focus group discussions. In total 4 boys and 5 girls participated in the study. It emerged that the adolescents (aged 15-17 years), view school violence as both negative (causing harm), as well as positive (to ensure order and protection). From the adolescents' perspective, conceptually violence interweaves constructs of power, discipline and aggression. Future adolescent-focused interventions on violence must include conversations about these nuanced understandings.

### **Keywords**

adolescents; corporal punishment; power; rural; school violence.

### **Background**

School violence is a complex phenomenon, its causes are multi-dimensional and its consequences have ramifications far beyond immediate perpetrators and victims (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002; Gilbert, 1996). This topic has garnered extensive literature and discussions over the decades (Braun, 2007; Burton, 2008; Jefthas & Artz, 2007; Lawson 2005; Steyn & Naicker, 2007 citing Vogel, 2002). What stands out amongst the plethora of literature outlining the prevalence, nature and experiences of school violence, is the apparent dichotomy, or divergence, between child reported incidents of violence or crime, and their attachments to any particular environment (Burton, 2008; Naser, 2005; Smit, 2010). In various studies, despite children reporting a high incidence of school violence, they also stated feeling safe at school (Burton, 2008; Lubbe & Mampane, 2008; Naser, 2005). This contradiction underscores the belief that children's constant exposure to criminal and violent acts in their homes and schools have led to the normalisation of such acts in their socialising contexts, and hence the perception that crime

and violence are part of the normal order of things (Burton 2008; Lawson 2005; Leoschut & Bonora, 2007).

Yet the phenomenon of school violence still cripples many communities in South Africa and world-wide. The scope and nature of violent crime in South Africa (CSV, 2010) concludes that 19 years into its transition to democracy, South Africa's legacy of apartheid and colonialism continues to affect the social and economic fabric of the country. This has created a culture in which people are accepting violence as a normal part of life (CSV, 2007; CSV, 2010). A multitude of causes and contributing factors have been identified, which are inextricably linked to South Africa's past of oppression (Barker & Ricardo, 2005; CSV, 2010; Jeffthas & Artz, 2007). Various conditions, unique to South Africa's past, have contributed to the nurturing of "a culture of violence that has reproduced itself" (CSV, 2009:6).

Understanding the lived experiences and needs of children is crucial to advocating for their needs at policy and programme level (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Despite the scramble to gather relevant data to inform intervention programmes, little attention has been paid to how children themselves make sense of, and interpret, experiences of violence at school (Burton, 2008; Parkes, 2007). The majority of surveys which have shed light on the problem of school violence, grounded in quantitative approaches (Neser, 2005; Steyn & Naicker, 2007) are structured according to adult views and assumptions. In truth, we do not know which events or variables cause children to feel more or less safe in schools unless we ask them to define the variables (Skiba, Simmons, Peterson, McKelvey, Forde & Gallini 2004).

This article outlines some of the findings from an ongoing partnership since 2005 between education scholars, teachers and children in a remote, South African school (Ebersöhn, 2010). We undertook this qualitative study to explore adolescent understanding of violence as contextualised in a remote school. The inquiry was directed by the following question: How do grade 9 adolescents in a remote school conceptualise school violence?

### **School violence in a remote school**

Defining 'rural' is a difficult undertaking as there is no common definition (Saloojee, 2009). "Definitions of 'rural' tend to emphasise a particular feature of rurality: settlement or demographic patterns; spatial or environmental characteristics; political or economic factors; and, socio-cultural or historical factors" (DoE 2005: 8). In South Africa, the definition of rural has to be expanded to include areas of dense settlement created by apartheid-driven land resettlement policies (DoE, 2005). This research was conducted in a rural school situated in a community described as rural due to its remote location, relatively poor infrastructure and little access to social amenities in the immediate vicinity.

In some community contexts in South Africa the opportunities for violence are greater (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002) therefore the rurality of our case played an important role in the study. A multitude of causes and contributing factors have been identified which are inextricably linked to the country's past of oppression (Jefthas & Artz, 2007), such as high levels of poverty or physical deterioration and lack of access to institutional supports (CSV, 2010; Dahlberg & Krug, 2002). A report on inequality and exclusion by the CSV (2008: 4) argues that the inequalities present in South Africa are 'deeply connected to structural processes that exclude

large sections of the population from meaningful participation in the economy.’ This feeds into the dynamics that contribute to violent crime, especially in rural communities.

The location of the study was further motivated by the assertion that rural schools in South Africa are more vulnerable to violence, due to high number of illiterate parents, lack of parental involvement, belief in witchcraft, unsafe school buildings and vague perceptions about the need for school safety (Netshitahame & van Vollenhoven’s, 2002). According to the Ministerial Committee of Rural Education (DoE, 2005) the challenges facing rural schooling are complex, intractable and interdependent, conceding that even after ten years of democracy, rural schooling has shown little improvement. Such comments serve to highlight the importance of placing the current study on school violence contextually, taking into account multiple systems (neighbourhood, community, country), as well as beliefs and attitudes (historical, cultural, political).

### **School: a context for socialising violence**

Problems within a school often correlate highly with characteristics of the school population and the community context (Baker 1998; Burton 2008; De Wet 2007; Harber 2004; Lubbe & Mampane, 2008; Reppucci, Fried & Schmidt, 2002). The assumption is, therefore, that children are products of complex interactions occurring within the different environments to which they are exposed, and in which they live. It is through social interaction that children gain experience, receive reinforcement or punishment for their behaviour and are exposed to various role models; which all profoundly influence their successes and failures in life (Mampane, 2004).

Such a systemic look at school violence further asserts that South African schools have become unsafe places for young people, modelling and encouraging violence rather than pro-social behaviours (Harber, 2004; Morrell, 2001; Ward, 2007). An overly controlling and restrictive approach to learning and discipline within the school can often promote aggression and violence (Mayer, 2010).

In this article, school violence refers to any negative actions experienced by children, teachers and other school staff, occurring during the course of carrying out school-related activities (Baker, 1998; Burton, 2008; Fong, Vogel & Vogel, 2008; Greene, 2005; Osborne, 2004 cited by Du Plessis, 2008). It further considers the perspective of school violence as ‘any behaviour that violates a school’s educational mission or climate of respect’ (van Jaarsveld 2008: 176). This includes the subtle manipulations and intimidations that take place within the classroom between children and between staff and children. “It is also about the dark sarcasm in the classroom, about the threats, about leaving the student ignored in the corner for months on end, about getting rid of a student, hounding him/her until he/she leaves or is suspended, about insults, put-downs and spite, and about classifying a young person as a ‘troublemaker’ or a ‘no-hoper’, knowing that the student is being harmed” (Sercombe 2003 cited by De Wet, 2007: 676)

## **Methods**

### ***Setting***

This study was conducted as part of the Flourishing Learning Youth (FLY) programme at a rural high school in Mpumalanga-province, South Africa. The school is located in a remote rural area, approximately 160 km from the nearest town in South Africa. The participants lived nearby the

school. There is no public transport available and children walk to school. The school experienced problems with a shortage of furniture and equipment for laboratories and a limited number of books in the library.

The FLY project forms part of academic service learning in a postgraduate educational psychology programme of the University of Pretoria. The school is involved in a longitudinal study conducted by the university. In FLY students in training provide psychological services to the youth in this remote school. Through this programme students are afforded the opportunity to develop competencies related to their scope of practice. FLY constitutes two, two-day site visits (6 hours per day, 24 hours in total) to the remote high school. During the first visit students conducted group-based assessments and during the second visit group-based therapy (intervention) based on the results of the assessment. A registered educational psychologist supervised the engagement on-site.

### ***Participants***

Adolescents in Grade 9 (aged 15-17) in the rural high school all participate in the FLY programme. Convenience sampling occurred with participants (n=9) in this particular focus of the study. Merriam (2002) suggests that since qualitative enquiry seeks to understand the meaning of the experiences of participants' perspectives, it is important that a sample is selected from which the most can be learnt. Nine children formed part of the group, four boys and five girls. It is important to note that while English is the language of instruction at the school, it is not the home language of the participants. Most of the participants spoke siSwati at home. All

participants provided written informed assent, and their parents/caregivers provided written informed consent.

### ***Data collection***

Data was collected through child-centred tasks (drawings, open-ended sentences) and informal conversations regarding the activities, observations documented as visual data (photographs) and in a research journal, as well as a focus group discussion. Child-centred tasks in the form of paper-based activities provided a means of gaining entry into the group, to create familiarity and to see how they construct meaning of various concepts, such as school violence, safety and their connection to the school (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Kwong, Arora & Mattis, 2007).

To engage with participants in a way that builds familiarity and allowed us to enter somewhat into their life-world, we chose to be what Corbin, Dwyer and Buckle, (2009 citing Adler & Adler, 1987) term active member researchers or observer-as-participants (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000). These observations were documented as notes in a research journal and formed part of the analysis, as well as visually (as photographs of the setting and processes) to provide rich description of the case (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2007). Therefore, while the focus group discussion helped us to understand how participants made sense of events and experiences, the participant observations were useful in understanding how events took shape and affected participants, in ways the group members might not even be aware of (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). To explore the process underlying adolescents' internalisations of their experiences of school violence, it was important to provide them with a platform in which to speak and explain. To access and capture diverse perceptions held by participants, researchers engaged with them in



a one hour focus group discussion (Leoschut & Bonora, 2007 citing Schurink, Schurink & Poggenpoel, 1998) revolving around the primary research question.

### *Data analysis*

As we interacted with the participants through data collection, we started to learn how they made sense of their experiences, and so began the process of making analytic sense of their meanings and actions (Charmaz, 2006). The focus group was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a co-researcher. Focus group transcriptions, child-centred tasks, photographs and the research journal were hand coded and compared for consistency of repeated observations. Analysis was guided by constructivist grounded theory principles (Charmaz, 2006) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Recurrent themes were identified and coding differences were resolved through debate and discussion when required. Relevant quotes were selected to depict central themes/categories.

### *Ethical considerations*

The study observed ethical guidelines pertaining to how participants were treated (informed consent), how information would be preserved ensuring confidentiality, and the nature of the researcher-participant relationship (protection from harm) (Davis, 1998; Neill, 2005). Participant study numbers were used on all documentation to conceal participant identities. The FLY programme has ethical approval by the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education Ethics Committee and the Department of Education.

## **Results**

### ***Violence and power***

A significant theme that emerged from the study is that of violence as a form of ‘power and authority’. Adolescents highlighted instances where violence was used at school by people who wield a form of power or authority over another person, or where violence is used for purposes of punishment, discipline or to protect. Participants seemed to clearly associate violence with authority, as demonstrated by the following response to why people hit others: ‘They think they’re the boss’ (15 year-old male). This theme includes consideration of school discipline and corporal punishment; violence used by authority figures to protect and maintain order; and violence as play.

### ***Violence as punishment***

Participants in the study spoke not only of bullying and fighting among peers, but also (and more extensively) of forms of corporal punishment (physically and verbally) by teachers. Adolescents discussed ‘violence’ or ‘abuse’ by teachers as a form of discipline or to punish. They spoke of corporal punishment being meted out with sticks and sjamboks (traditional leather whip), hitting with hands, slapping and pinching, as well as hitting children’s fingertips or knuckles with board-dusters or belt buckles. During the discussion one female participant pinched her upper arm and that of the girl next to her to demonstrate a teacher’s action. A boy made whipping motions on his back and others animated hitting (slapping) with an open hand, and made sounds (‘whack’, ‘pow’) to accompany the actions.

### ***Violence to protect***

Adolescents indicated that punishment and discipline are sometimes necessary and appropriate and should be enforced by certain members of the community. It seems that adolescents conceptualised violence by those in authority (such as headmaster and police) as appropriate and acceptable when used to correct bad behaviour or protect others. In this regard adolescents expressed that police violence is suitable to enforce discipline on school grounds for the purpose of protection and maintaining order. Below we present a vignette of two older boys fighting on school grounds during school time to illustrate participants' view that violence (such as beating) is an appropriate resolution when meted out by adults in society who are vested with the power and authority to discipline and bring about order.

*Participant (15 year-old male): one of the boys called the police.*

*Researcher: and then the police came? (all nodding) And they took him away?*

*Participant: ... and they beat him (demonstrating hitting actions with hands, fists)*

*Researcher: Oh I see. Where here or at the police station?*

*( boys motion towards the next building)*

*Participant: ... there ... staffroom.*

*Researcher: and then they beat up this boy? What did they beat him with?*

*(boys start demonstrating motions of hitting, kicking and punching)*

*Researcher: and what happened to the other boy? The one that called the police?*

*Participant: no nothing*

*Researcher: [the boy that was beaten] ... and he had to carry on being in school until he went home?*

*Participant: yes*

*Researcher: Did he stop beating other people afterwards?*

*Participant: he was better...*

*Researcher: so you think it worked that the police came and hit him?*

*Participant: Yes! (the others nod in agreement)*

### ***We're just playing***

Our conversations about school violence uncovered other instances where behaviour is not deemed violent. Engaging with the group, we observed that their communication included strong physical and verbal gestures, such as hitting one another, pushing someone away or calling each other names and laughing. The adolescents explained their understanding of violent behaviour in terms of intent and consequence. According to them, when the act of hitting or teasing is done by a friend and the people involved are laughing and smiling, then it is not considered violence but 'just playing'. At one point during the focus group a girl hit a boy on the head, another girl pointed this out to the researcher giggling, and a discussion ensued. It followed that the difference between an act of violence and 'play fighting' lies in the person's emotional response during and after the incident, as illustrated in the vignette below. Therefore, when 'play-hitting' both parties are happy, whereas when unacceptable 'real' violence has been inflicted, a person will feel sad or angry.

*Participant: she's beating him!*

*Researcher: I see, hey! .. you just hit him ...*

*Participant: (who had been hit) Yes!*

*Researcher: Is that not violence?*

*Participant doing the hitting: (smiles)*

Participant: She hit him like this on the head (demonstrates on fellow participant's head)

Researcher: Why do you hit other people?

Participant: but sometimes you are playing, you see ... (she 'gently' hits boy next to her and they both laugh and wriggle).

Researcher: Oh, I see. So is that also violence or not violence when you just play-hitting?

Participant: No it's not violence.

... Researcher: How would I know the difference?

Participant: when they are playing .. you see that they are happy

... Researcher: and if it is violence, what would I see?

Participant: Person is sad.

## **Discussion**

Although illegal in South African schools, corporal punishment is very much in use around the country, occurring in both rural (De Wet 2007; Morrell 2001) and urban schools (Smit 2010; Steyn and Naicker 2007). According to Morrell (2001) although the practise has been mostly phased-out of middle-income former white schools, corporal punishment is still very evident in township and rural schools and is inflicted on African boys and girls equally. Various studies have highlighted that corporal punishment and harsh discipline in schools perpetuates a culture of violence among children (Burnett, 1998; Harber, 2004; Steyn & Naicker, 2007) and leaves an 'invisible scar' that affects many aspects of the child's life (Harber, 2002). "This consistent exposure to violence – along with poor role-modelling and parenting and teaching styles that are punitive – allows the child to develop a repertoire of behaviours that include aggression as a way of dealing with conflict and difficult life situations" (Khan, 2008:2). This was evident in our

study with adolescents demonstrating reliance on physical and verbal aggressive behaviours to cope with violence in their school environment.

The issue of punishment and discipline in schools is not only controversial, but also raises several contradictions within literature, as well as in the current study. Condoning the appropriateness of violence is not synonymous with sanctioning it. It seemed that, on one hand, participants deemed acts of discipline and punishment necessary to maintain discipline and order in the school. However, on the other hand they wanted the violence at school to stop, describing it as a negative experience, expressing the desire for an alternative school climate where teachers and children could sit and talk openly about problems, stating: “I feel painful. Me ... I want it to ... stop!”, and we must “sit and talk ... solve the problem”. This is in line with other studies, showing that children often feel anger, hurt, sadness and powerlessness in relation to corporal punishment, and express the desire for more consultative forms of discipline (Morrell, 2001; Parkes, 2007).

This paradox is also evident in various other studies conducted in South Africa (Morrell, 2001; Parkes, 2007; Smit, 2010) and Botswana (Tafa, 2002), with respondents claiming that although corporal punishment is unlawful and ‘not right’, it is the only way to make sure children listen and respect their teachers and elders. Although conducted ten years apart, our study yielded almost identical findings to Morrell’s study (2001: 296) on how the use of corporal punishment is perceived by children, “With the exception of Indian and white females, most groups, but especially African and white males and African females, continue to regard beating as the most effective punishment.” Burnett (1998) explains this phenomenon in a different way, stating that

children's relative powerlessness against harsh disciplinary measures, together with the overriding ideological justification within the community that punishment is essential for ensuring conformity, establishes a cycle of violence where such punishment is sanctioned as sound educational practice.

Perhaps the issue to consider then is not the actual act of punishment that constitutes violence, but the intent and attitude of the act as perceived by the child. Many teachers believe that corporal punishment administered justly (with love) and in an environment of mutual trust, is necessary, right and acceptable (Morrell, 2001). We question, though, how often both child and teacher come into a disciplinary situation with the same frame of reference and understanding? This questioning highlights another interesting observation in the study, of whether children in the case demonstrated a normalisation of violence at school.

Carter (2002:29) also found that children frequently engaged in banter of hostile and abusive comments amongst themselves, but claimed: "it's only a laugh, Miss'; 'he's my mate, Miss' or 'we're only playing'." In an extensive study of masculinity and crime, Messerschmidt (1993 cited by Morrell, 2002) argued that violence was part of a vocabulary used by young men to live their masculinity. While rough-and-tumble play is mostly ignored in early childhood, it can re-emerge in adolescence resulting in serious fighting, as physical prowess becomes a way to stake a claim to dominance within the group. Lawson (2005) asserts that such aggressive rivalry is more commonly seen in communities where the social order is in flux, as adolescents are frustrated by feelings of resignation, fatalism and hopelessness. The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV, 2008) also put forward that although violence does not

always generate material rewards for perpetrators, it does offer some important psychosocial consequences to counteract feelings of insecurity and inadequacy as well as frustration, hopelessness and anger. Findings in the current study thus add to literature highlighting that there is a blurred line between how adolescents define play-fighting versus bullying or aggression. This begs the question whether those involved in incidents of school violence (children and teachers) share such understandings and definitions?

The growing violent nature of communities within South Africa has become a widespread characteristic and many researchers believe this has led to an apparent immunity among children to the violence that surrounds them (Burton, 2008; Lawson, 2005; Leoschut & Bonora, 2007; Naser, 2005). Normalisation is explained when children become habituated to the violence they are frequently exposed to and, therefore, gradually come to accept it as the norm, leading to an indifferent or nonchalant attitude towards violent events (Lawson 2005; Latess 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss this in terms of Kelly's notion of 'constructive alternativism, which they explain as a personal construct that attempts to do justice to the internal world of the person. It is used when an individual comes to an understanding of the view of the world held by those people involved in a situation, rather than adopting a different perspective or ascribing structural function to external aspects (stimuli) of the environment. Leoschut and Bonora's (2007) support this view observing that children exposed to criminal and violent acts in their homes and schools are often socialised into developing the perception that crime and violence are part of the normal order of things.



We did not observe this ambivalence in the current study's participants. In fact, as in the case of other studies like Morrell (2001) and Parkes (2007) participants were very much aware of violence occurring in their school and voiced concerns about wanting it to stop. Therefore, when considering participants' conceptualisations of, and reactions to school violence, we posit that it is not violence itself that adolescents normalise, but rather the reasons or motivations provided to use violence. This might shed light on participants' opinions on the acceptability of violence when used by people in authority for inappropriate behaviour.

Bronfenbrenner (1995) and Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) refer to meaning-making in terms of frequent exposure to proximal processes in the child's environment. Our findings indicate that adolescents are being socialised to accept violence as a 'functional tool' to obtain social control and order, as well as being an effective instrument in the hands of adults who have a relatively high ranking in the social hierarchy. Therefore, we add our voices to the claims that by observing adults in positions of power and authority engaging in violent behaviour, adolescents internalise the idea that violence constitutes a justifiable means to dominate others and control a situation, for the purpose of bringing order and obedience.

### **Limitations of the study**

The remote school from which the adolescents in this study were selected are predominantly Siswati and for this reason results may not be generalised to other populations. In this qualitative study we did not obtain data on violent behaviours nor ask for participants to disclose information on, for example, violent experiences. Studies that incorporate analysis of demographic information and data on violent behaviour may likely paint a more comprehensive

picture of conceptualisations of violence in this population. To truly gain insight into children's life-worlds requires time and engagement, therefore, we encourage future ethnographic studies with prolonged engagement and the use of a variety of child-centred strategies (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Punch, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

As mentioned before, the aim of the study was to explain how adolescents in a remote high school conceptualise school violence. This study also focused on the important role that contexts and societal attitudes play in adolescents' conceptualisations of their experiences of school violence. We have come to the same conclusion as Morrell (2002) and Bhana (2005) that violence - and in this case, school violence - is invariably bound up with issues of power. Children learn that violence is a means to enforce power, to shift power and to resist power. Therefore, when used by someone in a position of authority to enforce order, violence is acceptable (Cherrington, 2010). It is speculated that high rates of economic and social disintegration in many South African communities, and the history of apartheid inequities, have led to a brittle emasculated masculinity with a sense of powerlessness (CSV, 2008; Morrell, 2001). This results in children and youth with an increasing propensity towards using violence to regain a sense of power and control over their lives.

Schools are the key site where young people negotiate their understanding in the world and develop their capacity for social engagement and meaning-making (Jefthas & Artz, 2007; Powell 2003). However, schools can also be viewed as important contexts for indoctrination, reproduction of social relations and sites of systemic violence (Harber, 2004; Powell, 2003). An

important finding of this study was that school climate and values of fairness and justice regarding disciplinary practices influence violence within the school. School environments are intimately interwoven with their communities and environments (DoE, 2005). Therefore, the prevailing values and social attitudes within the school often reflect those of the surrounding community, contributing to the academic climate and policies within the school (Lleras, 2008). The interaction between teachers and children is particularly important in facilitating learning, supporting desired behaviour, and connecting the child to the school (Osher et. al., 2004).

Adolescents in this study remarked that it was difficult for them to speak to their families or teachers, and that they preferred to call the police for help. This shows how school violence, together with perceptions of unfairness and vulnerability, can likely lead children to lose trust in the school system, which seemingly fails to protect them from threats or attacks by others. The theme of unsupportive school climates, with inadequate cultures of learning, also featured in Lubbe and Mampane's (2008) findings, who concluded that risk conditions at schools relate to unsafe discipline policies, corporal punishment and an emphasis on compliance, conformity and obedience. Therefore, it is not simply a case of impoverished physical school infrastructure or poor classroom management practices that contribute to children's perceptions of school violence, but the "irrelevant, alienating and even threatening nature of schooling" itself (Harber, 2004:10). Harber (2002) criticised the irony of using power within schools to stem violence and bring about discipline, pointing out that when adults respond to violence in schools (if they respond at all) it is to the children who are violent.

There is a widespread belief that violence in schools is caused by societal cultures which encourage, tolerate and demand violence. The 'culture of violence' (CSVR, 2007; CSVR, 2010) which pervades the country is reflected in our study, with participants claiming that violence is necessary to maintain order and discipline. Images and values of popular culture subtly define what is important, the ways in which we interact and the meanings we construct (Powell, 2003). It can, therefore, be argued that the ubiquity of violence in entertainment seemingly communicates a clear consensus to children that violence is a common, legitimate and sometimes glamorous way of handling conflict and differences (Van der Westhuizen & Maree, 2009; Zulu, Urbani, Van der Merwe & Van der Walt, 2004).

Until recent decades, children were silenced, their voices unheard and their experiences largely concealed in the knowledge created by sociologists, anthropologists and historians (Thorne, 2002). Research with children and young people is crucial as it advances understanding of how they experience their world (Lewis, 2004). This study contributes towards understanding the complexities of violence in South African schools by giving voice to children in a rural school. By engaging participants in open and extended dialogue, we also hoped to have opened spaces or avenues for their meaning-making, and perhaps even given rise to reconstructions and contemplations. Walkerdine (2002 cited by Powell, 2003) states that adding a new voice to a conversation, a new point of view, does more than just increase the content in a linear way, it contains the potential to change the entire discussion. As no adult-created definitions were presented to participants, we believe this study provides insight into the life worlds of South African children. The themes which emerged in this study highlight the need for further discussion and insight regarding the ways in which school violence influences children's social

constructions of masculinity and femininity, especially taking note of the power dynamics underscored in this study.

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