

**Learners' perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural
primary schools**

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ABSTRACT

Learners' perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools

This study aims at exploring learners' perceptions of relational aggression in the intermediate phase of metropolitan and rural primary schools. The aim of the study was to investigate and explore learners' perceptions and experiences of relational aggression in the intermediate phase of primary school education. Research into the phenomenon of relational aggression among primary school learners is still in its infancy; there are few studies on this phenomenon in the South African school context. It is also important to note that relational aggression is a form of aggression that is covert in nature and is difficult to observe by teachers and parents, although the effects are considered to be at least as harmful as those experienced by victims of ongoing physical and verbal acts of aggression.

This qualitative phenomenological study is situated in Social Learning Theory and the Social Information Processing Theory. I chose this design in order to gain understanding into the perceptions and experiences of primary school learners who are employing or experiencing relational aggression. Several methods of data collection were used, including peer nomination, field notes and semi-structured individual interviews. Two themes emerged from the data analysis which uses open coding. These themes reveal that the learners in the study experience relational aggression in different ways and that they are able to articulate ways of dealing with relational aggression. The exploration of each theme and its categories and sub-categories includes verbatim quotations from the transcribed interviews followed by the relevant literature located by the researcher which provided substantiation for the findings.

This study indicates that learners are experiencing relational aggression on an almost daily basis. This has a negative impact on learners, resulting in their experiencing intense

emotions. It seems that teachers are neither aware of relationally aggressive acts nor who the perpetrators are. These and other findings emphasise the importance of further research into the phenomenon of relational aggression in a South African context. The guidelines and skills development are aimed at assisting learners who are experiencing relational aggression to deal with instances of relational aggression.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

RATIONALE AND OVERVIEW

1.1	BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE	1
1.2	PROBLEM STATEMENT	2
1.3	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	3
1.4	RESEARCH AIMS	3
1.5	CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS	4
1.6	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD	7
1.6.1	Research design	7
1.6.2	Research method	8
1.6.2.1	Ethical measures	8
1.6.2.1.1	<i>Confidentiality</i>	9
1.6.2.1.2	<i>Informed consent</i>	9
1.6.2.2	Measures to ensure trustworthiness	10
1.6.2.3	Research sampling	11
1.6.2.4	Data collection strategies	12
1.6.2.5	Data analysis	14
1.6.2.6	Literature control	14
1.7	DIVISION OF CHAPTERS	15
1.8	SUMMARY	16

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

2.1	INTRODUCTION	17
2.2	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	17
2.2.1	Gender differences regarding relational aggression	21
2.2.2	Ethnic identity as an influence regarding relational aggression.....	23
2.2.3	Socio-economic status as an influence regarding relational aggression	25
2.2.4	Age as an influence on relational aggression	27
2.2.5	Immediate environment as an influence on relational aggression	28
2.3	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	30
2.3.1	Introduction	30
2.3.2	The Social Information Processing Theory	30
2.3.3	The General Aggression Model	31
2.3.4	The Developmental Theory	33
2.3.5	The Social Learning Theory	34
2.3.6	The Theory of Subjective Culture.....	35
2.3.7	The Social Domain Theory	35
2.3.8	The Ecological Systems Theory.....	36
2.3.9	The Psycho-social Theory of Development	37
2.4	SUMMARY	39

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

3.1	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	40
3.1.1	Qualitative study	40
3.1.2	Exploratory nature of the study	40
3.1.3	Descriptive nature of the study	41
3.1.4	Contextual nature of the study	41
3.2	RESEARCH METHOD	42
3.2.1	Ethical aspects	42
	3.2.1.1 Informed consent	42
	3.2.1.2 Voluntary participation and privacy	43
	3.2.1.3 Confidentiality and anonymity	43
	3.2.1.4 Benefit to the research participants	44
3.2.2	Measures to ensure trustworthiness	44
3.2.3	Sampling	45
3.2.4	Data collection strategies	46
	3.2.4.1 Phase one: Peer nomination	46
	3.2.4.2 Phase two: Semi-structured individual interviews	47
	3.2.4.3 Field notes	47
	3.2.4.3.1 <i>Observational notes</i>	48
	3.2.4.3.2 <i>Methodological notes</i>	48
	3.2.4.3.3 <i>Theoretical notes</i>	48
	3.2.4.3.4 <i>Personal and reflective notes</i>	48
3.2.5	Data analysis	48
3.2.6	Comparison of findings with the literature	50
3.2.7	The purpose of the description of guidelines	50

3.3	SUMMARY	51
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CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION OF LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN METROPOLITAN AND RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	52
4.1.1	Data analysis	52
4.1.2	Discussion of results	52
4.2	THEME ONE: LEARNERS EXPERIENCE RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN DIFFERENT WAYS	55
4.2.1	Category 1: Learners' experience of relational aggression is influenced by their social contexts	55
4.2.1.1	Learners associate relational aggression with a lack of supervision by teachers	56
4.2.1.2	Learners use relational aggression as a tool to manipulate their peer relationships in a direct and indirect manner	58
4.2.1.3	Learners associate their experiences of relationally aggressive acts with learners who seem popular and well known to other learners	59
4.2.1.4	Learners experience relational aggression as a way of retaliation which is justified	61
4.2.1.5	Learners experience negative responses towards aggressors to encourage further acts of relational aggression	62
4.2.2	Category 2: Learners are aware of the influence of the presence of the teacher on relationally aggressive learners	63
4.2.2.1	Learners perceive teachers as unaware of relationally aggressive	

learners	63
4.2.2.2 Learners experience teachers to have misconceptions about relationally aggressive learners	65
4.2.2.3 Learners who are perceived as relationally aggressive maintain their reputation for good behaviour	66
4.2.3 Category 3: Learners describe their peers' parents who are employed at school as a contributing factor to their children's relationally aggressive behaviour	67
4.2.3.1 Learners experience direct parental involvement of their peers' parents as a form of protection	68
4.2.3.2 Learners involve their parents in conflict situations at school	69
4.2.4 Category 4: Learners experience relational aggression in a group bound context	71
4.2.4.1 Relational aggression is used as a means of controlling peer groups	71
4.2.4.2 Victims of peer groups' relationally aggressive behaviours experience intense emotions	73
4.2.4.3 Learners are aware of the hierarchies within peer groups	75
4.2.4.4 Learners experience group identity as more important than their own individual identity	76
4.2.4.5 Relational aggression is employed in direct and indirect ways	77
4.3 THEME TWO: LEARNERS ARTICULATE MEASURES TO MANAGE RELATIONAL AGGRESSION	80
4.3.1 Category 1: Learners suggest ways of how to deal with relational aggression	80
4.3.1.1 Learners suggest that aggressors should be approached and confronted	81

4.3.1.2	Learners suggest personal relaxation, reflective thinking or ignoring the aggressor as ways to deal with relationally aggressive learners...	82
4.3.1.3	Learners suggest that a person of authority needs to be informed about relationally aggressive acts	85
4.3.2	Category 2: Learners experience their own religious and personal values as issues which influence the way in which relational aggression is managed	86
4.4	DISCUSSION OF FIELD NOTES	89
4.4.1	Observational notes	89
4.4.2	Theoretical notes	90
4.4.3	Methodological notes	90
4.4.4	Personal and reflective notes	91
4.5	SUMMARY	91

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, GUIDELINES, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1	INTRODUCTION	93
5.2	DISCUSSION	93
5.2.1	The Social Learning Theory	93
5.2.2	The Social Information Processing Theory	96
5.3	GUIDELINES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS	98
5.3.1	The nature of relational aggression	98
5.3.2	The effects of relational aggression	99
5.3.3	Develop learners' assertiveness and coping skills	99

5.3.4	Curbing the use of relational aggression	100
5.4	PROPOSED SKILLS TO BE DEVELOPED	101
5.4.1	Relationship and friendship skills	101
5.4.2	Assertiveness skills	102
5.4.3	Conflict resolution skills	103
5.5	RECOMMENDATIONS	104
5.6	LIMITATIONS	106
5.7	CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY	106

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

DIAGRAM 1.1:	Forms of aggression	19
DIAGRAM 1.2:	Model of General Affective Aggression Model relating to relational aggression	32
DIAGRAM 4.2:	Simplified conflict resolution model	104

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1.1:	Measures to ensure trustworthiness	10
TABLE 3.1:	Strategies to establish and ensure trustworthiness	44
TABLE 4.1:	Schematic summary of identified themes, categories and sub-categories which articulate learners' perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools	53
REFERENCE LIST		108

ANNEXURES

A: Application to conduct research for M Ed. degree in Learner Support in primary schools in North West 121

B: Questionnaire 122

C: Application to conduct research: SGB 123

D: Application to conduct research: Principal 124

E: Application to conduct research: Teachers 125

F: Consent form: Parents 126

G: Assent form: Participants 127

H: Example of coded transcript 128

I: Letter of confirmation: Language editor 129

J: Biographical details of participants 130

CHAPTER ONE

RATIONALE AND OVERVIEW

This chapter presents the background of and rationale for the study, the research questions and the research aims. The concepts relevant to this study are defined and the research design is outlined. This includes the methodology used, ethical considerations, the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness and research sampling and the data collection strategies and methods of analysis. Brief reference is made to the literature survey. Finally the division of chapters is provided. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

During the past two decades, several researchers (Archer, 2001:269; Crick, Bigbee & Howes, 1996:1007; Grotzinger & Crick, 1996:2336; Gomes, Davis, Baker & Servonsky, 2009:178; Merrell, Buchanan & Tran 2006:358; Putallaz, Grimes, Foster, Kupersmidt, Coie & Dearing, 2007:544) have done research on a lesser known form of aggression known as relational aggression. Relational aggression is behaviour that intends to harm the victim through manipulation and damage of peer relationships. Such behaviour may include acts of ignoring a peer, giving the silent treatment, excluding peers from social interactions, spreading malicious rumours about a peer, whether such rumours are true or false and also attaching conditions to friendships (Crick & Werner, 1998:710). The literature on relational aggression does not yet provide a coherent picture as research in this area is still in its infancy. Several factors, such as sex, age, ethnicity and socio-economic status have been found to contribute to the prevalence of relational aggression, but very few findings to date can be generalized (Gomes *et al.*, 2009:175; Willer & Cupach, 2008:416; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield & Karstadt, 2000:990; Young, Boye & Nelson, 2006:305). The known effects of relational aggression include anxiety, loneliness, depression, loss of self esteem, social maladjustment, the desire to leave school, as well as the wish to commit suicide (Crick *et al.*, 1996:1135; Willer & Cupach, 2008:418; Wolke *et al.*, 2000:989). There have also been studies that indicate that there is a significant correlation between relational aggression and the lifelong use of cigarettes and marijuana. It also seems that those who have been victims of relational aggression over an extended period of time during childhood are likely to become addicted to alcohol and harder drugs (Skara, Pokhrel, Weiner, Sun, Dent & Sussman, 2008:1507-1515).

Learners in South African schools face enormous pressure to 'fit in'. At the same time meeting the criteria to do so is becoming increasingly difficult (Louw & Louw, 2007:257). The resultant competition amongst learners encourages acts of relational aggression. Even though most parents, teachers and learners are aware of the phenomenon of relational aggression, they dismiss it as a passing phase or simply 'part of growing up' (Gomes *et al.*, 2009:175; Willer & Cupach, 2008:416; Young *et al.*, 2006:298).

At present, despite the body of international research which indicates that relational aggression may be detrimental to the development of the victim (Crick *et al.*, 1996:1135; Prinstein, Boergers & Vernberg, 2001:479; Woolfolk, 2007:79), there does not seem to be any research done on this phenomenon by South African researchers. It seems that relational forms of aggression are just as harmful, if not more, than physical aggression, on which there has been a great deal of research conducted, especially in secondary schools in South Africa (Botha, 2006; Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2009:465; Young *et al.*, 2006:297). However, a number of researchers have identified the urgent need to investigate relational aggression specifically in primary schools (Putallaz *et al.*, 2007:524; Wolke *et al.*, 2000:990).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

School authorities in South Africa tend to intervene quickly when learners engage in physical forms of aggression due to the highly disruptive nature of acts such as fighting, verbal abuse, acts of violence and other distinct forms of physical aggression (Xie, Swift, Cairnes & Cairnes, 2002:206). However, it seems that schools, parents and educational authorities in South Africa have failed to address relational aggression. Putallaz *et al.* (2007:524) found that if schools were to recognize relational aggression as one of the most harmful forms of aggression, 60% of these aggressive acts would no longer be overlooked. It is clear that the phenomenon of relational aggression in South African schools deserves research attention. In undertaking this study, I set out to offer guidance to learners on relational aggression and to teach them some of the strategies that would enable them to manage situations. My aim was to help them avoid situations that could threaten the development of young learners.

Against this background, the following research questions were formulated.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research explores the following main research question: To what extent, if any, do intermediate phase learners in metropolitan and rural primary schools perceive and experience relational aggression?

This main research question was divided into three sub-research questions:

- How do intermediate phase learners in metropolitan and rural schools perceive and experience relational aggression?
- To what extent, if any, do intermediate phase learners' perceptions of relational aggression influence their use of relational aggression?
- What guidelines can be provided for intermediate phase learners who are involved in instances of relational aggression?

These questions enabled me to explore and then describe intermediate phase learners' perceptions and experiences as well as their use of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools in the Dr Kenneth Kuanda District in the North West province. The approach taken was qualitative phenomenological study designed to explore and describe the lived experiences of the intermediate phase learners who participated in the study.

1.4 RESEARCH AIMS

The purpose of this exploratory, descriptive and contextual study was to investigate and to explore the perceptions and experiences of relational aggression amongst primary school learners in the intermediate phase of the General Education and Training band in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of the North West province of South Africa. This study also set out to provide guidelines for intermediate learners on how to cope successfully with situations involving relational aggression.

The aims of this study were:

- To explore and describe the perceptions and experiences intermediate phase learners of relational aggression.
- To gain an understanding of how their perceptions and experiences of relational aggression influence their use of relational aggression. In order to attain the above-mentioned aim, it was firstly necessary to explore the phenomenon of relational aggression in the intermediate phase, and;

- To develop and provide guidelines for primary school learners who are involved in instances of relational aggression.

The underlying assumption was that if the perceptions and experiences of relational aggression amongst intermediate phase learners were explored and understood, certain conclusions could be drawn on the influences of relational aggression. These conclusions would help to provide guidelines for intermediate phase learners. Such guidelines aimed to help intermediate learners know more about relational aggression and teach them skills which, when correctly applied, could help them cope with relational aggression effectively. Furthermore, it is likely that learners who practice or suffer from relational aggression in an ongoing manner, are experiencing difficulty with their school work. This may be seen as an emotional barrier that hampers their performance. This study allowed for the understanding of relational aggression in the intermediate phase context which, if presented to teachers, could aid them in developing and learning skills that enable to effectively deal with relational aggression amongst the learners in their classes. Such intervention builds toward inclusivity in education and allows all learners to be supported and understood, therefore enabling them to reach their full potential (White paper 6, 2001:18).

1.5 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

The following concepts were used in this study:

- Learner

The concept 'learner' is defined by the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (South Africa, 1996:4) as "any person receiving education or obliged to receive education by the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996". In this study '*learner*' refers to a primary school child who is in the intermediate phase (South Africa, 1996:4). Learners at that level are typically between 9 and 10 years old when entering the phase and 12 to 13 years old when leaving the phase.

- Perception

A 'perception' refers to the "product of a secondary encounter with objects and events ... [which] involves the processing and interpretation of the sensory output" (Hartup, 1972 in Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2009:445). In this study 'perception' refers to the way in which a learner understands and conceives relational aggression. Reynolds and Repetti (2010:283) see 'perception' as directly related to an individual's experience of relational aggression (whether as an aggressor or a victim).

- Intermediate Phase

The second phase of the General Education and Training band consists of grades four, five and six (South Africa, 1996:4). Learners in this phase are typically in the middle childhood phase of development.

- Experience

The term 'experience' in this study pertains to the lived experience of relational aggression as experienced by the participant. Johnson (1997:21) defines 'experience' as "any event through which an individual has lived". Experience involves personal knowledge, personal involvement and first-hand knowledge and exposure (Johnson, 1997:21).

- Aggression

Various definitions of aggression are provided in order to indicate the difference between aggression and relational aggression. The term 'aggression', according to Louw and Edwards (1995:454), is "behaviour with the intention to harm someone else, whether physically or verbally or the damaging of object". Pearce (1989:54) defines 'aggression' as "behaviour in which a person is prepared to force his or her will on another person or object even if this means that physical or psychological damage might be caused as a result". Aggression in childhood is defined as: "physical or verbal behaviour intended to injure or harm someone else. Two forms of aggression are likely to develop during childhood namely: instrumental and hostile aggression" (Louw & Louw, 2007:198).

In this study, indirect aggression is an umbrella term from which relational aggression stems (Fiske, 2010: 392). Indirect aggression is defined by Archer (2001:268) as "a form of aggression that involves a distinction between aggression occurring behind the individual's back rather than face to face". Another definition that was useful in this study was established by Xie, Farmer and Cairnes (2003:356) which states that indirect aggression comprises of behaviours such as "ignoring, avoiding and excluding others from social interchanges. It also includes a different set of strategies in which the harm was indirectly achieved and thus the perpetrator could remain unidentified".

- Relational Aggression

The most widely accepted definition of relational aggression is that of Crick and Werner (1998:710):

Relational aggression generally describes deliberate attempts to inflict harm on peers through manipulation and damaging peer relationships. Common forms of relational aggression involve giving peers the silent treatment, excluding peers

from a social or play group, telling lies and spreading rumours about a peer to incite rejection, imposing conditions for friendships or refusing to select a peer as part of a school project.

Crothers, Field and Kolbert (2005:349) explain relational aggression as follows: “relational aggression is the use of confrontational strategies to achieve interpersonal damage and may include behaviour such as ignoring a person, threats of withdrawing a friendship, withdrawing emotional support and exclusion from a group”. Woolfolk (2007:78) defines relational aggression as “a form of hostile aggression that involves verbal attacks and other actions that are meant to harm social relationships. It includes behaviours such as insults, gossip, exclusion and taunts”. Similarly, Werner and Grant (2009:78) describe relational aggression as “a form of behaviour that is characterized by the removal, or the threat of removal of a relationship as the means of harm. It may also include social exclusion, malicious gossip and threats to withdraw friendship in order to control a peer”. More recent definitions include “the use of behaviours that intentionally harm the others’ interpersonal relationships such as spreading negative gossip and purposeful exclusion” (Shoulberg, Sijtsema & Murray-Close, 2011:21). Perhaps the most succinct definition is the one provided by Fiske (2010:402): “behaviours intended to damage another child’s friendships or sense of belonging in a group”. Fiske (2010:402) offers examples of such behaviours as exclusion, gossip and manipulation.

In this study ‘relational aggression’ is clarified as the use of any form of social manipulation, including both direct and indirect forms of social manipulation, employed specifically to cause harm to another person’s friendships, social status or self-esteem.

- Rural

In this study the term rural refers to a location outside the traditional boundary of suburban areas. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2009:11) define the term as “of the country or in the country as opposed to in town or city” (Donald *et al.*, 2009:11). In this study ‘rural primary school’ refers to a primary school located outside the boundaries of a metropolitan area where learners are from surrounding informal and farming settings.

- Metropolitan

In this study, the term ‘metropolitan’ is used to refer to “any area in a large city” or to mean “constituting a city and its suburbs” (Wilkes & Krebs, 2004:942). In this study ‘metropolitan’ thus refers to the areas that are characterized by urbanization and developed infrastructure.

In the following section the research design and method used in this study is discussed.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

1.6.1 Research design

This study is situated in an interpretive paradigm. The goal of such research is to study human action from the perspective of the insider and to understand behaviour rather than explain or predict it (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:53). As this research requires deep understanding of the participants' perception and experiences regarding relational aggression, the methods chosen need to be suited to the aims of this study and the chosen paradigm. Creswell (2007:17) explains that the methodological assumptions of qualitative research are that rich descriptions will be provided regarding the context of the phenomenon and that the questions will be constantly revised as new data emerges. It is particularly important that whichever phenomenon is studied, it should be studied in its 'naturalistic context' meaning that the situation or occurrence should be studied where it occurs (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:51). This study focused on relational aggression as it seems to manifest in the intermediate phase of metropolitan and rural primary schools, which in this study were the natural context of relational aggression.

Babbie and Mouton (2009:147) define a research design as a "structured plan or framework of how the research process will be conducted by me in order to solve the research question". This study chose a qualitative, phenomenological design situated in an interpretative paradigm in order to gain an understanding of the lived experience of relational aggression as manifested in the intermediate phase of metropolitan and rural primary schools (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:646; Nieuwenhuis, 2007:60). Furthermore, as Denzin and Lincoln (1994:3), advise the study was done in the natural settings and attempted "to make sense of, and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". As the research question indicates, the purpose of the study was to explore to what extent, if any, learners in the intermediate phase of both metropolitan and rural primary schools in the Dr Kenneth Kuanda District perceive and experience relational aggression. Since no sources on relational aggression in South African schools could be located, either in secondary or primary schools, the study was exploratory. As already indicated, the object was to provide guidance to learners about relational aggression and teach them strategies that could help them to cope with relational aggression. Since the study broke new

ground it also revealed areas for future study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:35). The study was also interactive in the sense that face-to-face, semi-structured individual interviews were used as a data collection strategy.

Since the focus was on the perceptions and lived experience of relational aggression, it was vital for me to set aside my prior personal experiences in order to understand the experience of the participants. Denscombe (2009:102) states that in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of the dynamics of a phenomenon, the rich and descriptive data that the researcher collects must be interpreted appropriately.

1.6.2 Research method

According to Mouton (2005:36), the term 'research method' is used to "refer to the means required to execute a certain stage in the research process" such as sampling methods, data collection methods and data analysis methods. As part of providing a thick description of the research process, it was necessary to clearly state the methods that were applicable to execute the research process in a most objective and unbiased manner (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:255).

1.6.2.1 Ethical measures

In this study, there were several ethical aspects that needed to be considered, namely: confidentiality, informed consent and assent and anonymity. Punch (2006:56) and Creswell (2007:47) emphasise the importance of meeting ethical requirements throughout the study as a means of protecting the participants from harm, which should be the greatest concern of the ethical researcher. In this study, I took every ethical measure necessary to protect the participants from harm and to ensure the overall quality and integrity of the study.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the North West University. Application to conduct research in metropolitan and rural schools was also requested from the North West Department of Basic Education (see Annexure A). Once permission had been obtained from the North West Department of Basic Education, I purposively selected two primary schools in metropolitan and rural areas in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of the North West province. I obtained consent to conduct research from the School Governing Bodies (see Annexure C), the school principal (see Annexure D), the teachers in the Intermediate Phase (see Annexure E) and the parents of the learners in the Intermediate Phase (see Annexure F).

Learners in the intermediate phase were purposively selected to participate in the first phase of the research. This entailed peer nomination (Waasdorp, Bagdi & Bradshaw, 2010:102; Werner & Grant, 2009:84); all learners in the intermediate phase participated in nominating classmates for different friendship attributes. Some of the attributes allowed me to identify which learners were perceived by peers as relationally aggressive (see Annexure B). Learners identified as relationally aggressive by their peers during the peer nomination process were purposefully selected to participate in the second phase of the research process which consisted of semi-structured individual interviews. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time during the research. In order to avoid any deception on the part of the researcher, the purpose of the study was conveyed unambiguously to all participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:525). As the learners were minors (under 18) consent was obtained from their parents and assent was obtained from the learners themselves (see Annexure G).

1.6.2.1.1 Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the participants, schools and any other role players (barring the researcher) remains protected throughout the study and thereafter. The names of the participants were not included in the transcripts or any other documentation and were removed as soon as possible (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:523). When making use of a strategy such as peer nomination, it is of utmost importance to adhere strictly to ethical guidelines. There was to be no risk to (deception of) the learners involved, either during the peer nomination process or to those who were peer nominated, nor to the participants who took part in the semi-structured individual interviews, as this would have influenced the participants negatively (Young *et al.*, 2006:300). All the participants were ensured of confidentiality and were informed that no significant changes would occur in peer interactions if correct ethical guidelines were followed during nomination (Young *et al.*, 2006:300). All information and data collected were safeguarded in order to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

1.6.2.1.2 Informed consent

Informed consent (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007:41) required that the participants and their parents as well as the university and school authorities understood fully what the research process entailed. Participants were explicitly told that they would not be receiving any reward for participation. The informed consent form contained adequate detail explaining how both phases (which are explained in

detail in Section 3.2.1 of Chapter Three) of the research process works, and how confidentiality was and remains protected. The focus of the research was also included in the consent form (See Annexure F).

1.6.2.2 Measures to ensure trustworthiness

In qualitative research, such as this study, the referring to “reliability and validity refers to research that is credible and trustworthy” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:80). In order to enhance trustworthiness in this study, I made use of semi-structured individual interviews which yielded transcripts which were coded by me as well as independent coders, to ensure the trustworthiness of the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:80).

Nieuwenhuis (2007:80) states that “since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of validity is sufficient to establish the latter.” The various methods of data collection mentioned above and the involvement of other researchers in the analysis enhanced the reliability of the study and increased the trustworthiness of the results.

TABLE 1.1 Measures to ensure trustworthiness

CRITERIA	STRATEGIES TO BE APPLIED IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY
Truth value	Credibility
Applicability	Transferability
Consistency	Dependability
Neutrality	Confirmability

(Adapted from Krefting, 1990:217)

Golafshani (2003:602) is among those who argue that qualitative research established truth through the trustworthiness of the study rather than its validity and reliability. I made use of four criteria in this study to ensure trustworthiness (Goodlam-Babee, Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2005:577). The four criteria are: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality (see Table 1.1).

- **Truth Value**

Truth value was achieved by making use of the strategy ‘credibility’. Credibility includes prolonged engagement. The researcher must continue data collection until data saturation occurs or the research no longer yields new findings. Credibility was ensured as I made use of multiple forms of data collection strategies which in this

study included peer nomination (Field, Kolbert, Crothers & Hughes, 2009:35) field notes, observation and semi-structured individual interviews. The referential adequacy of the study was ensured by audio-recording all of the interviews conducted by the researcher. As a final move to ensure credibility, I engaged in member checking by gaining understanding into the participants' intentions in data and the interpretation of the data.

- **Applicability**

The second criterion, applicability, was gained by making use of the strategy 'transferability'. The criteria for transferability in this study were thick description and purposive sampling.

- **Consistency**

The third criterion for ensuring trustworthiness in this study was consistency, which was achieved by the strategy 'dependability'. Dependability was achieved by triangulation and coding. Triangulation was achieved by making use of multiple strategies for data collection such as: peer nomination, field notes, observation and semi-structured individual interviews. Coding was done by independent coders as well as me.

- **Neutrality**

The fourth criterion, neutrality was ensured by the strategy 'conformability'. Conformability was achieved by providing the independent coders with the original transcripts. Other materials relating to the intentions and dispositions including the research proposal and peer nomination sheets were also made available to the independent coders. The interview development information has been stored.

The strategies used to establish and ensure trustworthiness were described above and are set out in Table 3.1 in Chapter Three Section 3.2.2.

1.6.2.3 Research sampling

Two primary schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda district were randomly selected for participation in this study. Both primary schools have an intermediate phase consisting of grades four, five and six, which is the phase on which this study focuses. All the classes in the intermediate phase participated in the peer nomination process (see section 3.2.1.1 regarding consent). The random selection of one metropolitan and one rural primary school was sufficient, each with several

classes in the intermediate phase. The use of purposive sampling (Creswell, 2009:178; Nieuwenhuis, 2007:79) was relevant in this study as the participants were selected by means of predetermined criteria. In several studies, researchers used peer nominations to identify both victims and aggressors regarding relational aggression (Card, Hodges, Little & Hawley, 2005:147; Field *et al.*, 2009:35). In this study, peer nomination was used only to identify relationally aggressive learners. This has been found to be one of the most reliable methods of identifying aggressors of relational aggression, from a learner's point of view (Field *et al.*, 2009:35; Geiger, Zimmer-Gembeck & Crick, 2003:30; Kistner, Counts-Allan, Dunkel, Hardee-Drew, David-Ferdon & Lopez, 2010:285). The learners remained anonymous during the peer nomination process by omitting their names on the class list on which they responded to a series of questions concerning their peers and their behaviour. Learners responded to the question asked, by writing the number of the question on the class list next to the name of the learner with whom they most associated such behaviour or attributes. This process allowed me to identify which learners were perceived by their peers as relationally aggressive. During primary school years, friendship characteristics create a likely context for the development of relational aggression as learners' peer groups become larger, they move away from their parents and they tend to disclose more personal information to their peers than before (Stauffacher & DeHart, 2006:229). It is thus likely that learners in the intermediate phase would have experienced at least some form of relational aggression, or have in some way made use of relationally aggressive behaviours in social contexts.

The number of interview participants was not established prior to the research process as I could not estimate the number of learners identified as relationally aggressive.

1.6.2.4 Data collection strategies

In order to ensure that I gained an understanding of the participants' perceptions and experiences of relational aggression in the intermediate phase of primary school education, multiple data collection strategies were used in this study such as: peer nomination, field notes, observation and semi-structured individual interviews (Creswell, 2009:13). In a phenomenological study the intention of the research is to acquire an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2009:13; Denscombe, 2009:13). Guba and Lincoln (1985:106) believe that the behaviour of humans cannot be understood unless researchers take account of the

meanings they attach to their experiences. For this reason qualitative data collection strategies were used (Guba & Lincoln, 1985:106).

I collected data in two phases. During the first phase I made use of anonymous peer nomination. Peer nomination is a strategy which allows the researcher to determine which learners typically make use of relational aggression. This strategy is not influenced by the perceptions that teachers may hold of learners, which is often different to the perceptions that learners hold of their peers (Field *et al.*, 2009:35; Young *et al.*, 2006:300). The peer nomination process entailed handing blank class lists to participating learners of each class in the Intermediate Phases, of the participating primary schools. I asked the participating learners questions from a predetermined questionnaire (see Annexure B). The questionnaire contained both negative and positive questions and behavioural attributes. The positive questions and attributes served as buffers for the potentially adverse effect of negative question and attribute nominations made by the learners during the peer nomination process (Young *et al.*, 2006:301). Learners were asked to nominate one learner with whom they most associated the behaviour or attribute described in the question, by writing the number of the question next to that learner's name. The negative questions and attributes allowed me to identify learners who were perceived as relationally aggressive by their peers. The learners who were identified as relationally aggressive by means of the peer nomination process were purposefully selected to participate in the second phase of the research.

During the second phase of the research the learners who were identified as relationally aggressive during the first phase of the data collection process, were asked to participate in semi-structured individual interviews. An interview is a method of data collection in which the researcher and a respondent enter into a conversation that is initiated by questions from the researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:643; Creswell, 2007:43; Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87). Learners who participated were required to give their assent before the scheduled semi-structured individual interview took place. The semi-structured individual interviews were conducted by me.

The semi-structured individual interview as a data collection strategy makes use of a predetermined question posed to all participants. In this study, the following question, "How would you get back at someone whom you have a problem with, without getting caught?" was posed at the beginning of each semi-structured individual interview to initiate discussion. Responses elicited information, description, experiences or ideas that continued the interview. The purpose of semi-structured individual interviews in

this qualitative research study was to elicit rich and descriptive data from the participants that enabled I to understand the participants' perceptions and experiences regarding relational aggression in the intermediate phase of primary school education (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87). The informal structure of this type of individual interview is particularly suitable for learners of this age as it follows the nature of conversation that may encourage the participant to be comfortable during the interview as I was actively listening to what the participant had to say (Creswell, 2007:43). All semi-structured individual interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. These audio-records were transcribed and analysed by making use of qualitative data analysis in the form of open coding (Creswell, 2009:175; Nieuwenhuis, 2007:101). The individual semi-structured interviews were conducted until data saturation occurred and no new categories emerged from the data (Boeije, 2010:118; Creswell, 2007:240). This resulted in 25 semi-structured individual interviews. Independent coders were contracted to ensure that the initial findings were reliable and correct.

1.6.2.5 Data analysis

The purpose of data analysis in a qualitative study is to gain understanding into the experience of the participants as they describe their experiences and the meaning they attach to these experiences (Creswell, 2009:175). The 25 transcripts obtained from the audio-recordings of the semi-structured individual interviews were used for open coding analysis (Creswell, 2009:186). Open coding is the process of 'breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data' (Boeije, 2010:96). In this study, the process of open coding assisted me to understand and interpret the raw data. The findings of such analysis were considered and emergent themes and categories were identified (Boeije, 2010:114). Furthermore, the analysis was then revisited and triangulated. Triangulation is a process that ensures reliability by requiring that more than one method of data collection be used. Provided that the methods yield similar results or themes, the data triangulates and is considered credible (Creswell, 2007:208; Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007:37).

I made use of Tesch's method during the open coding process to guide the process of coding (Creswell, 2009:186).

1.6.2.6 Literature control

The purpose of conducting literature control is to provide merit to the findings that emerge from the study (Mouton, 2005:6). I made use of multiple sources of literature

including books and journal articles both printed and electronic. I also made use of electronic search engines namely, SABINET and EBSCOHOST, to locate literature related to relational aggression. Search terms included 'aggression', 'indirect aggression', 'social aggression', 'relational aggression', 'perception', 'learners', 'rural', 'metropolitan' and 'experience'. The literature consulted were from national and international sources and provided me with understanding of typical research design, methodology, data collection strategies, data analysis strategies and indicated findings from previous studies. This allowed me to develop an understanding of the existing literature in which to locate the findings of this study.

1.7 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

The rest of the study is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter Two presents the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. It explores the relevant literature on the influences that gender, ethnic identity, socio-economic status and age have on the phenomenon of relational aggression and how these relate to this study. The chapter also provides a discussion of the theories that underpin the framework of the study: the Social Information-processing Theory, the General Aggression Model, the Developmental Theory, the Theory of Subjective Culture, the Social Domain Theory, the Ecological Systems Theory and the Psycho-social Theory of Development. In addition, the chapter identifies the gaps in the literature on relational aggression in a South African context, more specifically in the intermediate phase of primary school education.

Chapter Three describes the research design and methodology employed in this study. This includes an in-depth discussion of ethical considerations, measures to ensure trustworthiness, sampling, data collection strategies, and data analysis strategies.

Chapter Four describes the findings that emerged during the data collection process. These findings are presented in the form of two themes, which are further divided into categories and sub-categories. The discussion of each sub-category is substantiated by means of relevant verbatim quotations from the data as well as relevant literature. The chapter also provides a discussion of the field notes recorded by myself during the data collection process.

The final chapter of the study situates the findings within the Social Learning Theory and the Social Information-processing Theory. Following the discussion of the findings, guidelines for learners who are experiencing relational aggression are presented. The next section of the chapter recommends strategies that could be used by learners experiencing relational aggression to manage instances of relational aggression. The recommendations for further study are followed by a short discussion of the limitations of the study, before final conclusions are drawn.

1.8 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the background of and rationale for this study as well as the research questions and aims. This chapter also explained the research design and methodology and presented a clear indication of the measures taken to ensure that the research was ethical and trustworthy. The following chapter contains the conceptual and theoretical framework of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

In this chapter I provide the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. This includes the influence of gender, ethnic identity, socio-economic status and age on relational aggression. Next I discuss the theoretical framework of this study including the Social-Information Processing Theory, the General Aggression Model, the Developmental Theory, the Social Learning Theory, the Theory of Subjective Culture, the Social Domain Theory, the Ecological Systems Theory and the Psycho-social Theory of Development.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Punch (2006:151) a 'conceptual framework' is a "framework showing the central concepts of a piece of research and their conceptual status with respect to each other". The following section provides the literature relevant to this study regarding relational aggression.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

'Aggression' is defined by Fiske (2010:390) as "any behaviour whose proximate intent is to cause harm to another person", giving a clear indication that injury must be the intent of the behaviour. Furthermore, aggression is divided into two types or categories. Fiske (2010:391) distinguishes between two types or categories of aggression: hostile and instrumental aggression. Hostile aggression refers to aggressive behaviour that is premeditated and intends to cause harm as a means to an end. Instrumental aggression, on the other hand, refers to behaviour that is impulsive in nature and seeks only to harm. Both of these forms of aggression are traditionally known as direct forms of aggression; they are physical in nature and result in physical injury. The term 'indirect aggression' is used to describe the behaviours that are covert in nature but also intends to harm the victim (Field *et al.*, 2009:8). In recent years, indirect aggression has been referred to as 'social aggression' and 'relational aggression'. Relational aggression is defined by Field *et al.* (2009:10) as "behaviours which intend to harm another person's friendships or feeling of belonging in a particular peer group ... [whose] ... is to punish a peer for a perceived violation".

Aggression research worldwide has received a great deal of attention as the importance of aggression research and the implications it has for society cannot be ignored. Most prior studies, however, have focused on youth aggressive behaviour which primarily includes overt and physical forms of aggression. Such investigations have presented several key limitations which have led to a renewed effort to understand less investigated forms of aggression (Leff & Crick, 2010:504). Overt and physical aggression refers to readily observable forms of aggression which include direct actions such as: bullying, physical fighting and teasing (Golmaryami & Barry, 2010:128). Such aggressive behaviours are termed 'direct aggression'. However, in recent aggression studies researchers began to investigate forms of aggressive behaviours which are not overt and aim at causing harm through non-physical means. Such forms of aggression are broadly termed 'indirect aggression' (Archer, 2001:267; Fiske, 2010:392). Other forms of indirect aggression have emerged which include *social aggression* and *relational aggression* (Smith, Rose & Schwartz-Mette, 2010:244). The term 'relational aggression' refers to a form of indirect aggression which is covert in nature and is generally defined as "a set of manipulative behaviours used to inflict damage on another through damage to relationships, threat of damage to a relationship or both" (Williams, Fredland, Han, Campbell & Kub, 2009:489). Diagram 1.1 below indicates the various forms of aggression:

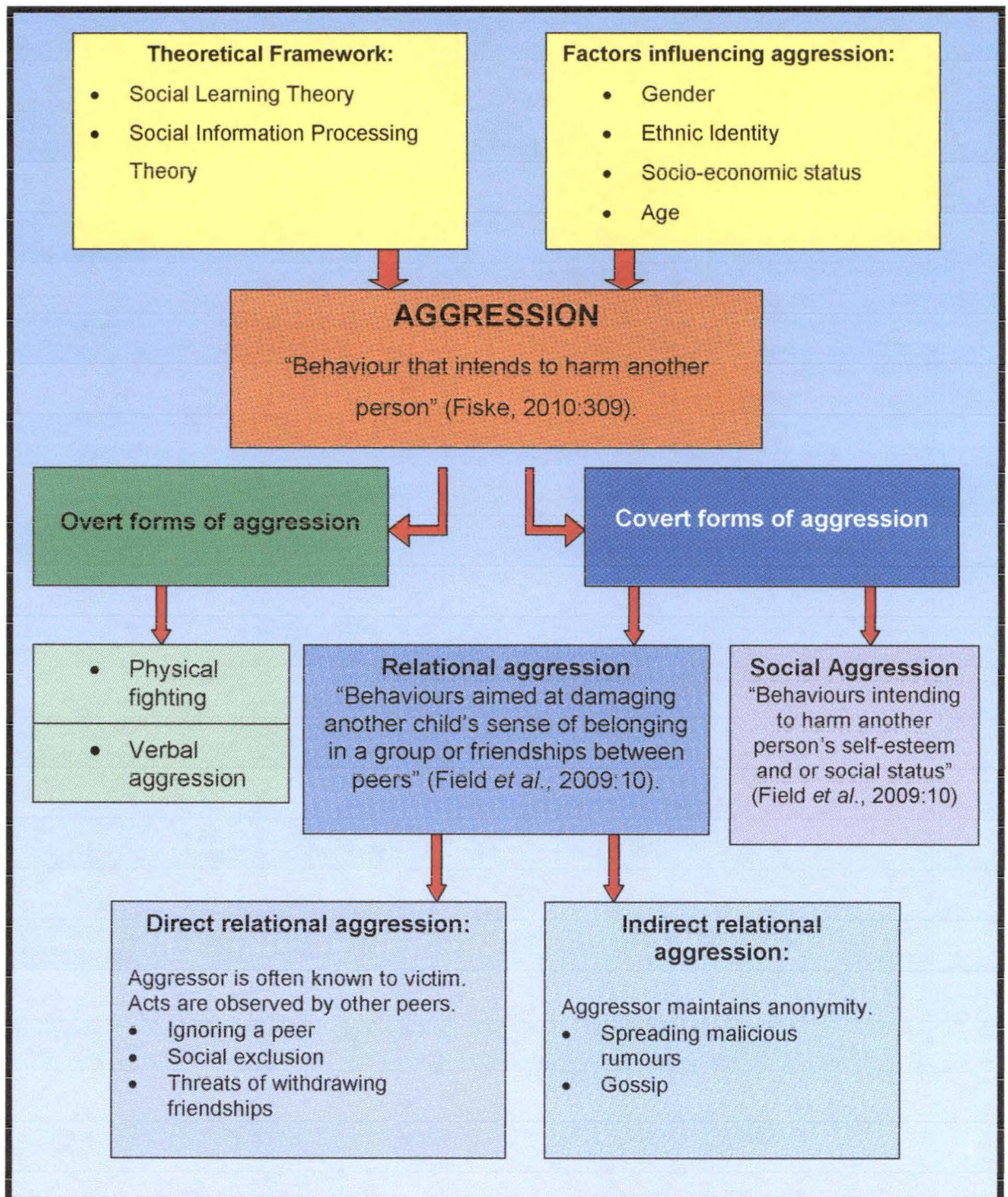


DIAGRAM 1.1: Forms of aggression

In this study, I focused only on relational aggression and behaviours that are considered relationally aggressive, including: the withdrawal of friendships, avoiding or excluding peers from social interactions, gossip, social rejection, rumour spreading, ignoring a peer and direct control of relationships by a peer by means of

threats from a relationally aggressive peer (Williams *et al.*, 2009:489, Ripley & O'Neil, 2009:1; Pemice-Duca, Taiariol & Yoon, 2010:303).

Literature regarding previously mentioned forms of overt aggression (see diagram 1.1) and aggressive behaviours that are not considered relationally aggressive was not reviewed. This research therefore focused only on relational aggression as perceived and experienced by learners in the intermediate phase of primary school education.

As relational aggression includes various forms of covert behaviours, I made use of several sources, to ensure that as many of the possible behaviours which are classified as relationally aggressive were included. Therefore the term 'relational aggression' as it is used in this study draws on a number of definitions. Relational aggression refers to "behaviour that is intended to harm another's social relationships" (Grotperter & Crick, 1996:313), "behaviour that causes disruption of interpersonal relationships" (Murray-Close, Crick & Gallotti, 2006:348), "when the aggressor makes use of actions that are either direct or indirect and includes acts such as: ignoring a peer, threatening to withdraw a friendship, withdrawing emotional support and exclusion from a group" (Crothers *et al.*, 2005:349) and "other socially manipulative behaviours that are both covert and overt (Young *et al.*, 2006:298).

There has been very little research on relational aggression in the South African primary school context. I review the literature I consulted on the phenomenon of relational aggression in the following sections. The discussion includes influences on the phenomenon of relational aggression such as the gender of relationally aggressive children and victims (Basow, Cahill, Phelan, Longshore & McGillicuddy-Delisi, 2007:85; Card *et al.*, 2005:146); the age of the aggressors and victims (Murray-Close *et al.*, 2006:345); the ethnic identity of aggressors and victims (Crothers *et al.*, 2005:353); and the influence of various socio-economic circumstances and statuses on the prevalence and use of relational aggression (Curtner-Smith, Culp, Culp, Scheib, Owen, Tilley, Murphy, Parkman & Coleman, 2006:190).

I use this review of the literature on each of these influences on the prevalence and perceptions of relational aggression to demonstrate the need for this study.

2.2.1 Gender differences regarding relational aggression

Aggression research has mainly focused on the prevalence and causes of overt aggression amongst samples of boys since these forms of aggression appear to be more common amongst boys (Crapanzano, Frick & Terranova, 2010:434; Smith *et al.*, 2010:243). In recent years of aggression research, attention has been drawn to the differences between the genders (Smith *et al.*, 2010:243). Most of the literature that I consulted indicates that girls are more prone to being relationally aggressive (Basow *et al.*, 2007:86; Coyne, Archer, Eslea & Liechty, 2008a:578; Crothers *et al.*, 2005:349; Fiske, 2010:404; Merrell *et al.*, 2006:351). There are several possible explanations for this. Firstly, children have less recourse to physical forms of aggression after early childhood, although forms of frustration do not necessarily decrease (Smith *et al.*, 2010:244). It is possible that as children grow older, verbal and social skills develop which allow more covert forms of aggression to develop and to take preference over forms of overt aggression as an aggression strategy. Coyne and Whitehead (2008:384) argue that girls are more likely to use relational aggression as they mature faster than boys, both verbally, socially and cognitively (Bowie, 2007:110; Coyne & Whitehead, 2008:384; Fiske, 2010:402). In this regard, Crothers *et al.* (2005:349) and Field *et al.* (2009:15) argue that girls seem to have a better understanding of how important relationships are and have a strong need for connectedness, which reflects the kind of emotional and social intelligence necessary for effective use of relational aggression. Since girls at the level of those in this study are at a stage when this need for peer approval and "connectedness" develops, they are more likely to use relational aggression when in conflict situations rather than physical or overt forms of aggression (Crothers *et al.*, 2005:351; Fiske, 2010:402). In their study, Willer and Cupach (2008:417) conclude their increasing desire to be popular, leads to competition amongst the girls. This may be a contributing factor to the prevalence of relationally aggressive behaviours between girls and their cliques.

Secondly, stereotypical characteristics of the female gender role are already being established as early as elementary school (Coyne *et al.*, 2008a:578; Crothers *et al.*, 2005:349; Fiske, 2010:402; Merrell *et al.*, 2006:352; Putallaz *et al.*, 2007:525). It is therefore likely that girls who are influenced by the expectations of their society would make use of relational aggression in conflict situations because of its subtle nature and the knowledge that the use of overt forms of aggression are frowned upon (Bowie, 2007:108; Nelson, Springer, Nelson & Bean, 2008:653; Swearer, 2008:612; Young *et al.*, 2006:298).

Thirdly, findings in a study conducted by Underwood and Rosen (2009:16) indicate that during middle childhood and adolescence children from both genders require and expect different elements in friendships. The peer cultures of genders differ significantly and may influence the choice of the aggression strategy used by the particular gender group (Smith *et al.*, 2010:245; Underwood & Rosen, 2009:17). Girls have been found to be more aware and sensitive to the harm that can be caused by making use of such types of aggression than boys and thus they are more capable of employing relationally aggressive behaviours in a social context (Smith *et al.*, 2010:245). It has also been found that adult women are more inclined to use socially manipulative forms of aggression, such as relational aggression (Berkowitz, 1993:258; Cullerton-Sen, Cassidy, Murray-Close, Cicchetti, Crick & Rogosch, 2008:1737; Merrell *et al.*, 2006:350; Randall, 2001:40).

Fourthly, the international studies on relational aggression that indicate that relational aggression is largely a female form of aggression have neglected to investigate the prevalence of relational aggression amongst boys (Card, Stucky, Sawalani & Little, 2008:1187; Leadbeater, 2010:588; Smith *et al.*, 2010:246). There are studies which have indicated that boys in several developmental stages make use of relational aggression. It seems, however, that they remain more likely to make use of overt forms of aggression than girls (Leadbeater, 2010:588; Smith *et al.*, 2010:244; Waasdorp *et al.*, 2010:99; Young *et al.*, 2006:298;). Other studies that contest the notion that girls are more prone to using relational aggression (Basow *et al.*, 2007:86; Putallaz *et al.*, 2007:525) have found that the effects of relational aggression are as detrimental to boys as it would be to girls (Murray-Close *et al.*, 2006:370; Swearer, 2008:612). An interesting finding made by studies that had equal samples of boys and girls is that boys use relational aggression but they are less likely to be victimized by relational aggression (Nelson *et al.*, 2008:653; Swearer, 2008:612; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009:736).

It appears that much more research is necessary before a clearer picture will emerge. Several studies by Murray-Close and Crick (2006:472), Crothers *et al.* (2005:354) and Basow *et al.* (2007:85) have indicated that relational aggression is an almost exclusively female issue. However, Stauffacher and DeHart (2006:237) and Kuppens, Grietens, Onghena, Michiels and Subramanian (2008:660) believe that gender alone cannot predict the prevalence of relational aggression. The results of the longitudinal study done by Stauffacher and DeHart (2006) show that relational

aggression occurs almost equally amongst boys and girls. The first, fourth and seventh graders in their sample made use of various forms of aggression including relational aggression across both genders (Stauffacher & DeHart, 2006:237).

It seems that various types of aggressive behaviours are used during different developmental phases of child development (Botha, 2006; Xie *et al.*, 2003:357). Stauffacher and DeHart (2006:230) found that during early childhood, there is a high prevalence of relational aggression among siblings across genders. However, in middle childhood, relational aggression appears to cease almost completely amongst siblings, but escalates alarmingly amongst friends of both genders (Stauffacher & DeHart, 2006:229).

It appears that although there are still significant gaps in the available research, boys appear to remain more likely to engage in physical forms of aggression, whereas girls seem more likely to make use of different forms of relational aggression (Young *et al.*, 2006:298). In the following section, ethnic identity as an influence on relational aggression will be discussed, showing how it applies to this study.

2.2.2 Ethnic identity as an influence on relational aggression

'Ethnicity' is defined by Giddens (2004:688) as the "cultural values and norms which distinguish the members of a given group from others". An ethnic group is thus a group of people who share the same values and norms and may be of the same race (Giddens, 2004:688). Identity is the individual characteristics of a person, or the characteristics of the group in which a person finds him/herself in. Some characteristics of such a person or group which are easily identified may include gender, nationality or ethnicity and social orientation (Giddens, 2004:691).

The ethnicity of an individual plays a role in identity formation (Louw & Louw, 2007:284). From infancy, children begin to construct meaning in relation to behaviour experienced through social observation and interaction. Therefore, historical, cultural and intellectual shifts in a given ethnic group may influence the development of their understanding of a phenomenon such as relational aggression. The eventual result may be a shift in the values of a particular family and or even the communal and cultural values of that particular group (Donald *et al.*, 2009:58). Crothers *et al.* (2005:353) found that ethnicity influences the choice of aggression strategy. Despite increasing interest in the prevalence of relational aggression in different cultural and

ethnic contexts, there are very few studies that have investigated such instances (Waasdorp *et al.*, 2010:99). Recent cross-cultural studies have extended the research by adding that ethnicity and cultural contexts not only influence the choice of aggressive behaviour, but also the age at which the aggressor is likely to begin practising and engaging in forms of aggressive behaviour (Xie *et al.*, 2002:371).

According to Xie *et al.* (2002:353) African- American girls are more likely to engage in overt forms of aggression (Crothers *et al.*, 2005:353; Xie *et al.*, 2002:353) but this finding has not been supported by all studies consulted by the researcher. It seems that there is evidence of relational aggression, usually in more indirect or subtle forms, in various continents. Comparative studies in Indonesia, Japan, Britain and the USA found that women and girls engage easily in such subtle forms of aggression because it allows them to remain anonymous while causing considerable harm to the victim (French, Jansen & Pidada, 2002:1144).

As far as perceptions are concerned, findings by Putallaz *et al.* (2007:541) indicate that teachers viewed African-American girls as more overtly and relationally aggressive, a notion supported by Crothers *et al.* (2005:353). However, African American girls are also more likely to be victimized by perpetrators making use of relational aggression. Peers view all girls as more likely to make use of relational aggression than overt forms of aggression. However, teachers view Caucasian-American girls as the girls more likely to make use of relational aggression. Such results indicate that ethnicity is likely to be a factor in perceptions of relational aggression. It seems that teachers might be more sensitive to forms of aggression that are displayed by their own ethnic groups (Putallaz *et al.*, 2007:541).

There is a growing awareness of the need to research relational aggression among other ethnic groups since most of the available literature focuses on relational aggression among white suburban learners (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009:731). I thus purposively selected primary schools with a diverse ethnic enrolment of learners. Certain primary schools in the Dr Kenneth Kuanda District could provide a solid foundation for exploring relational aggression amongst intermediate phase learners in a South African context, since the demographics of these primary schools are diverse.

In the following section the socio-economic status of learners and the influence this status has on relational aggression will be discussed in relation to this study.

2.2.3 Socio-economic status as an influence in relational aggression

A great deal of research has been conducted on the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and overt forms of aggression, yet very few studies have investigated whether a similar relationship exists between SES and relational aggression (Gomes *et al.*, 2009:175). It is generally accepted that poor socio-economic circumstances lead to a greater prevalence of overt forms of aggression (Clarizio & McCoy, 1990:93). As yet, however, there is no evidence to support the notion that socio-economic circumstances influence relational aggression in South Africa.

The studies in other countries have not found an association between relational aggression and lower SES. Relational aggression is more sophisticated and often allows the perpetrator to remain anonymous, which makes it an appealing form of aggression to those who wish to protect spotless reputations (Coyne *et al.*, 2008a:578). Curtner-Smith *et al.* (2006:190), who focused on the prevalence of relational aggression in areas of low income, found that SES influences the type of aggressive behaviour used, at what age it develops, and when it is most prevalent. Furthermore, the literature suggests that children living in areas where poverty is rife and whose parents form part of a low income group are more likely to be involved in overt forms of aggression (Curtner-Smith *et al.*, 2006:190). Randall (2001:76) argues that low income parents are less likely to be intimately involved in the lives of children, and may lack empathy, an emotion that inhibits the development of all forms of aggressive behaviour. Waasdorp and Bradshaw (2009:742) posit that some parents may perceive the phenomenon of relational aggression as 'part of growing up' and so completely disregard relational aggression (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009:742).

A study conducted by Hoff, Reese-Weber, Schneider and Stagg (2009:395) focused specifically on the relationship between higher social positions or class, and the prevalence or frequent choice of relationally aggressive behaviours, specifically in the age group that this study focused. The findings indicate that the higher the class of the aggressor, the more he or she is able to influence the type of aggression strategy chosen by the peer group as a whole. When any type of aggression gains the support of the members of the group, that behaviour is unlikely to change. It should be noted that the social context of relational aggression has not been sufficiently researched to date and therefore this finding warrants further research. Their study

also found that relational aggression is a predictor of the aggressor's social status, as these learners were viewed as the 'popular' learners, were central in all social networks and were considered the dominant member of their social groups (Hoff *et al.*, 2009:401). Another study investigating the effects on victims of relational aggression found that such forms of aggression were often used by 'popular' peers to reinforce the fear their victims had of elite groups. Those who use relational aggression in these elite groups know that social centrality is the key to their social success and dominance. The most likely way for such groups and group members to achieve and maintain high status would be to ruthlessly employ acts of relational aggression as a means of ensuring the obedience of learners outside their social groups. This was not true of learners who exhibited physical forms of aggression.

Learners from higher SES groups also appear to be more engaged in relational aggression as relational aggression serves specific social purposes. Learners from higher SES groups are usually central in peer networks, which allow them to use of relational aggression effectively. The social intelligence of these learners allows them to be more aware of the impact of relationally aggressive acts on their victims (Xie *et al.*, 2003:356). They may also be more aware of the implications of engaging in forms of overt aggression, and thus prefer to avoid getting caught in the act of committing acts of aggression (Curtner-Smith *et al.*, 2006:184; Putallaz *et al.*, 2007:525; Xie *et al.*, 2003:356).

Merrell *et al.* (2006:350) believe that higher social status is a "prerequisite for the effectiveness of relational aggression". Victims are usually from a lower SES group (Willer & Cupach, 2008:417; Xie *et al.*, 2003:371).

Learners who make use of relational aggression not only come from mainly higher socio-economic backgrounds, but they were also found to be more academically capable and to perform well in class (Woods & Wolke, 2004:151). This may imply that these learners were more familiar with the social skills, resources and social intelligence necessary to use relational aggression to manipulate social networks and achieve social goals (Carpendale & Lewis, 2006:54; Wolke *et al.*, 2000:999; Xie *et al.*, 2002:372). In low income areas, parenting skills are often poor and the interactions children from these areas observe are likely to encourage them to resolve conflict by using overt forms of aggression (Curtner-Smith *et al.*, 2006:191). These learners may also be less likely to employ acts of relational aggression since

they would not have observed the role players in their lives using these behaviours (Berkowitz, 1993:189; Randall, 2001:79; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009:742).

The following section presents age as an influence on relational aggression.

2.2.4 Age as an influence on relational aggression

The age at which learners begin to practise forms of indirect aggression such as relational aggression, influences how it prevails in certain age groups (Murray-Close *et al.*, 2006:346; Randall, 2001:75; Stauffacher & DeHart, 2006:229). It seems that learners are already capable of discriminating between forms of physical and relational aggression in pre-school classes (Murray-Close *et al.*, 2006:345). However, even though pre-schoolers are capable of using relational aggression, they prefer making use of physical or other overt forms of aggression (Wolke *et al.*, 2000:997). It seems, that they wait until they have acquired the necessary skills to employ such behaviours effectively before using it themselves (Wolke *et al.*, 2000:150) but by the age of eight, relational aggression is significantly prevalent as (Bowie, 2007:108) found in his study of learners aged eight, eleven and fifteen years. Once in adolescence, they purposefully engage in relational aggression (Willer & Cupach, 2008:416). By grade seven, learners are fully capable of using relational aggression, especially those who are central in peer networks (Xie *et al.*, 2002:205). Therefore it seems as though relational aggression emerges as early as in the preschool years, although relational aggression is not normative until learners reach the intermediate phase of primary school education (Kistner *et al.*, 2010:282; Wolke *et al.*, 2000:999).

Although learners can discriminate between forms of physical and relational aggression, they perceive acts of relational aggression as a moral issue, finding relational aggression harmful and hurtful to the victim emotionally, whereas physical aggression is viewed as less emotionally harmful (Murray-Close *et al.*, 2006:349). Woods and Wolke (2004:153) also indicate that pre-school learners are aware of the damage that relational aggression could cause the victim. When Woods and Wolke (2004:154) used a sample of 1 982 learners between the ages of six and eight years, they found these learners make use of relational aggression effectively. Furthermore, both boys and girls engaged in relationally aggressive behaviours (Wolke *et al.*, 2000:154).

Stauffacher and DeHart (2006:236) believe that when learners reach middle childhood, relational aggression decreases sharply among siblings, but it increases

significantly amongst friends. Learners often threaten to withdraw their friendship and are likely to manipulate peer relationships, an example of direct relational aggression (Coyne *et al.*, 2008a:577). As learners grow older, they become capable of fine tuning their ability to use relational aggression to the extent that both parents and teachers find it very difficult to detect. This may be one reason why it seems to decrease when in fact it does not (Stauffacher & DeHart, 2006:235).

2.2.5 Immediate environment as an influence on relational aggression

The immediate environment of the individual is yet another influence on whether or not relational aggression is promoted or inhibited (Kuppens *et al.*, 2008:660). It seems that the degree to which relational aggression occurs in the classroom and is observed by other learners in the class directly influences the likelihood of other children choosing to display such forms of aggression. Furthermore, the gender composition of the class group, as well as the gender of the teacher, may be another classroom variable influencing the prevalence of relational aggression. It appears that in classes where girls are in the majority, relational aggression is the most common type of aggression displayed by the learners in the class. The boys in such classes are also more likely to engage in certain forms of relational aggression (Kuppens *et al.*, 2008:660).

The literature clearly indicates that it is important to explore the various functions of relational aggression because they influence when and how relational aggression will be used and whether it will be used directly or indirectly (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:284). With regard to this study, I found the exploration of the functions of relational aggression a means of acquiring a better understanding of the phenomenon. It also informed the guidelines I developed for learners involved in instances of relational aggression (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:283). When used indirectly (rumour spreading, writing crude letters or gossiping) the perpetrator may be able to remain anonymous. Remaining anonymous allows the perpetrator to act in an aggressive manner, without fear of retaliation or detection and punishment (Randall, 2001:39; Xie *et al.*, 2003:370). School authorities are more likely intervene when aggression is physical as it is highly disruptive and readily observable and may become violent (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:282; Xie *et al.*, 2003:371).

The threat of relational aggression may also be employed as a 'safety net' to secure popularity and friends (Grotperter & Crick, 1996:2332). Self-reported aggressors

disclosed that they expected a high level of trust from their peers, although they took care to withhold much of their personal information (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996:2332). Personal information may become a form of ammunition that can be used as a threat, should conflict arise between peers (Prinstein *et al.*, 2001:480; Randall, 2001:39).

The literature indicates that relational aggression is not only used to maintain a high level of social status or dominance, but may also become a tool used to damage romantic relationships (Willer & Cupach, 2008:426). Relationally aggressive acts appear to be more effective when they are witnessed by other learners. This indicates that the public humiliation of a victim is another function of relational aggression (Willer & Cupach, 2008:426).

Studies on relational aggression found that the victims were perceived as sad, depressed and lonely. These victims reported feelings of anxiety, loneliness, fearfulness and they tended to avoid social situations (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996:2331; Putallaz *et al.*, 2007:527). This confirms that relational aggression certainly causes harm to an individual. A recent study (Pokwel, Sussman, Black and Sun, 2010:257) indicates that peer groups play a role in shaping the aggressive behaviour of adolescents, specifically regarding the use of relational aggression. Pokwel *et al.* (2010:257) also found that relational aggression was used instrumentally to gain acceptance and popularity amongst high-status individual peer groups and the general peer hierarchy.

Amongst girls between the ages of fourteen and fifteen years, relational aggression was most often employed as a form of revenge and as a tool used to establish social dominance (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:284). Participants (a particularly diverse group of teenage girls) reported that ignoring a peer was perceived as the most effective form of relational aggression as it leads to feelings of guilt by the victim as well as the public humiliation of the victim (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:284). Other reasons the participants reported as motivations for making use of relational aggression were: alleviating boredom, jealousy, attention seeking, self-protection, revenge on another peer and the desire to be included in a social group (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:285).

The following section presents the theoretical framework for this study.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.3.1 Introduction

The purpose of a theoretical framework is to situate or locate research (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007:30). In this study, it provides an explanation for the phenomenon of relational aggression as it is experienced and perceived by learners in the intermediate phase of primary school education.

There are several theories that attempt to provide an explanation of how the phenomenon of aggression develops and is maintained in children. Each of them has limitations (Crick, Grotpeter & Bigbee, 2002:1139). It seems, however, that the theories concerned with cognitive strategies and cognitive steps provide the most useful points of departure for investigating relational aggression in learners (Archer, 2001:269; Crick *et al.*, 2002:1139; Crick & Werner, 1998:1630; Murray-Close *et al.*, 2006:346). Other theories that attempt to provide an explanation and a framework regarding aggression and aggressive behaviour in children take account of the environment of the child and other contributing factors. This is because the environment in which learners live and function on a daily basis may reveal some of the influences on the choice of aggressive behaviour or aggression strategy. These theories will be described in order to contribute to providing a firm theoretical foundation for this study. It should be mentioned that no single theory seemed to be able to fully explain the phenomenon of aggression or relational aggression (Archer, 2001:270; Huesmann, 1987:13). For this reason I have drawn on several theories to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for the study on relational aggression.

2.3.2 The Social Information Processing Theory

The Social Information Processing theory has provided evidence that learners' social behaviour is the result of a complex process that entails a number of cognitive steps (Crick *et al.*, 2002:1134). Huesmann (1987:14) believes this theory provides evidence for the notion that aggressive behaviour is learnt when learners find themselves in situations where they observe aggression (Huesmann, 1987:14). The Social Information Processing theory is particularly important with regard to relational aggression as it is likely that relational aggression is mostly an observed behaviour (Fiske, 2010:407).

Aggression has been generally found to increase when portrayed in the media and observed by children (Fiske, 2010:394). Relational aggression portrayed in the media may have a definite influence on children; findings have indicated that in learners' programmes, specifically animated Disney films, acts of relational aggression are portrayed 9.4 times per hour and are usually committed by a person that children are likely to identify with (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008:391). Evidence for a cross-over effect has also been found. When learners view forms of physical aggression they are more likely to react aggressively in conflict situations, and are also more likely to make use of relational aggression (Coyne, Nelson, Lawton, Haslam, Rooney, Titterington, Remnant & Ogunlaja, 2008:1553). If the use of relational aggression is rewarded when observed, it serves to reinforce such behaviour.

In this study, participants are in middle childhood. This is considered to be a time when the media strongly influence children (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008:382; Louw & Louw, 2007:204). As many learners have parents that both work, they are left to their own devices in the afternoons. They spend a great deal of time watching television in which they view both physical and relational forms of aggression. Such observations provide one possible explanation for the increased use of relational aggression during middle childhood (Bushman, Anderson & Wang, 2005:62; Huesmann, 1987:15).

2.3.3 The General Aggression Model

Another theory relevant to this study is the General Aggression Model (GAM). The GAM suggests that cognitive scripts in memory help to guide and interpret human behaviour (Coyne *et al.*, 2008b:1552). Crick *et al.* (2002:1139) found that learners who are relationally aggressive are more likely to interpret peer actions as hostile and consequently engage in some form of relational aggression as a means of retaliation. Crick *et al.* (2002:1143) support the notion that if a learner observes violence and other forms of aggression, including relational aggression, aggressive scripts are activated that may increase the use of aggressive behaviours by the learners (Huesmann, 1987:16). Murray-Close *et al.* (2006:345) found that learners have very specific patterns of information processing that influence their behaviour, specifically regarding the use of aggression. Baron and Byrne (2000:443) discuss another theory related to the GAM, namely the General Affective Aggression Model (GAAM). This model shows that aggressive behaviours and the choice of aggressive behaviours are influenced by a number of different input variables that are found in a

specific situation. The model has two types of input variables: aggressive models, which include cues associated with aggression and factors causing discomfort, and individual differences, which include the individual's personality traits, attitudes, beliefs and attributions regarding aggression, as well as the skills related to the use of aggression. The GAAM has traditionally only been used to provide framework for overt forms of aggression but may be applied to relational aggression as illustrated in the diagram below:

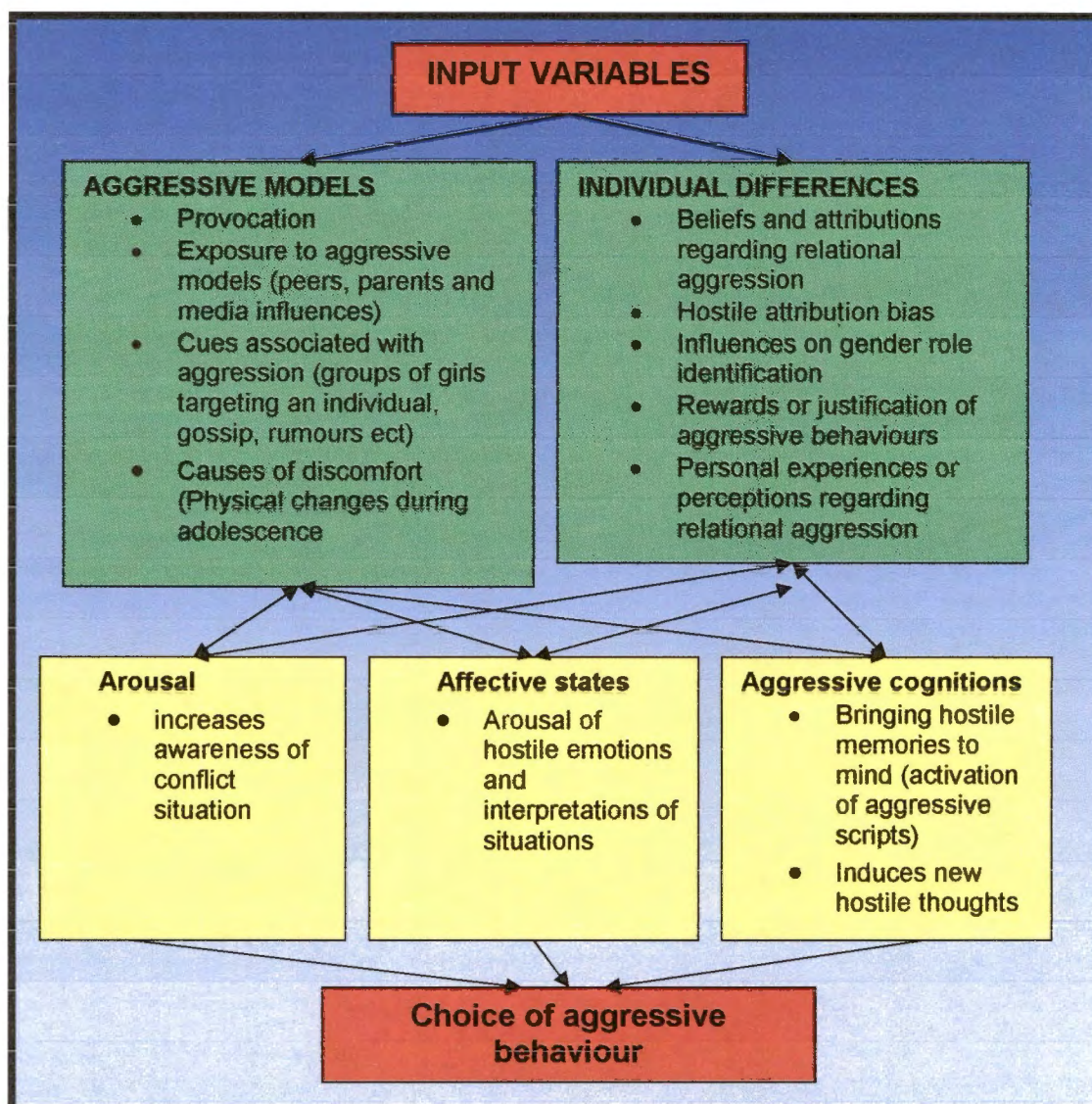


DIAGRAM 1.2: Model of General Affective Aggression relating to relational aggression (adapted from Baron & Byrne, 2000:444).

In the adapted model of the GAAM illustrated above, the input variables that activate cognitive scripts remain the same as in the original model. The aggressive models include provocation, exposure to aggressive models, which include peers who are relationally aggressive, parents who practise relational aggression and media influences for example: viewing relational aggression on television programmes in

which the use of relational aggression is portrayed by successful characters that the individual can relate to and which portrays relational aggression as a justified behaviour that is often accompanied by the satisfaction of achieving social goals. The aggressive models also include the different cues that an individual may associate with aggression and factors which may cause discomfort and thus lead to the use of relational aggression. The second input variable, individual differences, includes the varying beliefs and attributions an individual holds regarding the use of relational aggression. Individual differences also include the influences of gender role identification which may influence the likelihood of an individual making use of relational aggression (Field *et al.*, 2009:15). Individuals also hold different beliefs regarding the justification or rewards associated with certain types of aggression, including relational aggression, which may play a role in their choice of aggression strategy when aggressive scripts are activated. Finally, the personal experiences an individual has had with forms of relational aggression, whether as a victim or as an aggressor, may further influence their use of relational aggression. The input variables leads to arousal (an increased awareness of the conflict situation and the details regarding the situation), affective states (hostile emotions or negative attributes regarding an individual or a situation which influence the perception of another's intention in the situation), and the activation of aggressive cognitions during which aggressive scripts are activated and hostile thoughts are induced. Arousal, affective states and aggressive cognitions then lead to the choice of aggression strategy which, in this adapted model of the GAAM, would be the employment of a form of relational aggression.

2.3.4 The Developmental Theory

The Developmental Theory posited by Bjorkqvist, Osterman and Kaukiainen (2000:448) provides another theoretical framework for the development of relational aggression from a cognitive perspective. This is specifically related to the gender differences in the prevalence of relational aggression. This theory is based on the premise that advances in a learner's ability to use language, understand social structures and develop cognitive skills result in a greater repertoire of aggressive behaviours or more sophisticated styles of aggression which can be employed by a learner when in a conflict situation (Baron & Byrne, 2000:150; Kistner *et al.*, 2010:283). During childhood, several developmental differences between boys and girls emerge. An important difference is that girls tend to become more relationship orientated and the interactions between girls are more intimate and personal. Such

interactions allow for greater levels of self-disclosure between girls and the sharing of personal details. These secrets may be used by the aggressor as a threat, allowing the aggressor to manipulate social networks and peer relationships (Kistner *et al.*, 2010:284). The development of language is generally earlier in girls than in boys, which allows for earlier development of relational aggression (Baron & Byrne, 2000:150; Kistner *et al.*, 2010:283).

2.3.5 The Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory recognises that the environment plays a major role in the development of an individual's gender role which may have an influence on the individual's choice of aggressive behaviour (Louw & Louw, 2007:188). It also provides evidence that children learn gender roles in two ways: differential reinforcement and observation as well as modelling. Differential reinforcement refers to the reward for 'gender-appropriate behaviour' and 'punishment of inappropriate behaviour'. From a young age it is evident that boys and girls in Western society are treated differently, and engage in different types of 'gender-typed play' (Louw & Louw, 2007:189). Such activities are one of the foremost contributing factors to the ideas that learners develop regarding suitable and appropriate behaviours within their gender. This offers a possible explanation for the varying strategies of aggression which may be used by boys and girls respectively. Boys are regarded as more masculine and therefore overt forms of aggression are not necessarily frowned upon, whereas the same is not true for girls.

Regarding observation and modelling, relational aggression is most likely an observed form of aggression (Louw & Edwards, 1995:455). Field *et al.* (2009:18) agree that observational learning plays an important role in the development of relational aggression. Learners often model behaviour of those from whom they seek approval. Such parties may include learners who are popular at school, adult role models or characters with whom they can relate that are portrayed in regularly viewed television programmes (Field *et al.*, 2009:18). During middle childhood, such models may become peers who exhibit relationally aggressive behaviours. Mothers and fathers have also been found to display forms of relational aggression and such behaviours are often subtle but the rewards are readily observable by a child. An example would be a mother giving the father the silent treatment for neglecting to meet a housework commitment. Once the father has completed the task, all is well again. Girls may be more prone to accepting such forms of behaviour as strategies to manipulate social relationships, as they are more likely to seek the approval of their

mothers (as boys do for fathers) and therefore model such behaviour in their own relationships with peers (Louw & Edwards, 1995:455; Louw & Louw, 2007:189). Media may also further influence the development of gender roles (Louw & Louw, 2007:189). Furthermore, forms of relational aggression have been found to dominate children's television programmes, and are generally portrayed by female characters, whereas overt forms of aggression are typically portrayed by male characters (Coyne *et al.*, 2008b:1551). The portrayal of different types of aggression on television by male and female characters may therefore directly influence a child's perception of specific types of aggression being regarded as suitable for a specific gender.

2.3.6 The Theory of Subjective Culture

The Theory of Subjective Culture, developed by Triandis in 1976, (cited by Phelps, Meara, Davis & Patton, 1991:349) suggests that personal values and attributions are determined by values and attributions that are peculiar to a specific cultural group. The theory was relevant to this study as the sample was diverse so cultural influences came into play (see Addendum J). The purposively chosen sample in this study included cultural and ethnic diversity and it is possible that perceptions and experiences of relational aggression are experienced influenced by cultural and ethnic differences (Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2009:446). This theory can be closely associated with the evolutionary perspective (Field *et al.*, 2009:14) in which identification with gender roles are considered an important factor in the choice of aggression by an individual. Louw and Louw (2007:185) explain that gender role and gender identity refers to the knowledge a learner has of him or herself, and by the time a learner enters pre-school, he or she becomes aware of gender stereotypes. This influences or dictates certain behaviours considered to be typical of the gender of the learner. In some cultural contexts, for example, overt aggression amongst females is frowned upon and therefore girls may be more likely to make use of other, more subtle forms of aggression in order to deal with conflict situations or establish social dominance (Cullerton-Sen *et al.*, 2008:1747; Letendre, 2007:353; Lim & Ang, 2009:640; Merrell *et al.*, 2006:351).

2.3.7 The Social Domain Theory

Another theory which may be useful in providing a theoretical framework in this study is the Social Domain Theory. According to Goldstein and Tisak (2010:471), the Social Domain Theory can be used to study the social reasoning children apply to

forms of aggression, which leads to their enacting a behavioural choice such as relational aggression. The premise of this theory is that all thinking (cognition) about concepts is organized within social knowledge domains, which are constructed out of the individual's interaction with the environment. A child's cognition is influenced by three factors. Firstly children consider whether the behaviour they want to display is categorized as involving the rights and welfare of others. Secondly, they will consider the arbitrary rules of societal conduct which allows the child to consider whether or not the behaviour is acceptable to society or not and thirdly, the child considers the behaviour as either a personal choice or a behaviour that impacts on others (Goldstein & Tisak, 2010:477). It has been established that children do not view relational aggression and physical aggression as the same type of misconduct or behaviour. With regard to relational aggression, it appears that children regard relational aggression as wrongful behaviour, due to their moral reasoning. Children view relational aspects of their social world as a personal domain, which may also explain why they are less likely to involve their parents in instances of relational aggression, as they feel that parents have fewer jurisdictions over their personal relationships (Goldstein & Tisak, 2010:477). Physical aggression, on the other hand, was perceived as wrong because it is an overt behaviour which was noticeably incorrect and concrete. Goldstein and Tisak (2010:477) reported a finding directly related to this study, indicating that perceptions children hold of relational aggression specifically, are multifaceted and complex. It appears that children perceive relational aggression as harmful because it was seen as wrong on a moral level, specifically inflicting on others' rights and welfare.

Although this theory is useful when exploring the perceptions children hold of relational aggression, this study is situated in a South African context and the Social Domain Theory, like the other theories discussed, may not be directly applicable in the relational aggression context of South Africa.

2.3.8 The Ecological Systems Theory

The Ecological Systems theory was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner and provides a model for multidimensional human development (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2005:10). The Ecological Systems Theory emphasises the interaction between the individual and the environment and the systems within. The systems model, which provides an illustration of the theory, contains firstly the *Microsystems*. This includes the individual, family peers and school systems with which the individual frequently interacts. The *Mesosystem* illustrates how the different Microsystems interact with

each other. The third system, the *Exosystem* includes the local community of the individual and the fourth, the *Macrosystem* is the society in which the individual lives (Landsberg *et al.*, 2005:11). The effect on and contribution to aggressive behaviours in children is noted by Swearer (2008:613) who believes that peers, classroom variables, school contexts, family as well as societal contexts either contribute to or inhibit the conditions which lead to a variety of aggressive behaviours including relational aggression. With regard to the Microsystem, learners who are placed in classroom environments where they frequently observe or experience relational aggression are more likely to make use of relational aggression in conflict situations (Swearer, 2008:614). According to the Ecological Systems Theory, the use and prevalence of relational aggression in the Microsystems may be influenced by the role of the parents (Mesosystem). Parents' strategies and attitudes toward instances of relational aggression could either teach learners to manage such instances in a positive or proactive manner, or teach learners to retaliate or mismanage such forms of aggression (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009:731).

2.3.9 The Psycho-social Theory of Development

The literature review also revealed the stage of development of the children in the study as an important factor. The theory of childhood development I selected is the Psychosocial Theory of Development which was developed by Erik Erikson in 1965. This theory has had a substantial influence on social research (Donald *et al.*, 2009:62). The theory describes eight stages of development and also takes the social context of the individual into account. The age group of this study focuses on the intermediate phase and this theory in this theory is considered middle and late childhood. Erikson (1965) describes several key characteristics of this stage which may be related to the development of relational aggression in this age group. Learners in this stage begin to expand their social contexts and move away from their parents (Donald *et al.*, 2009:63). Other role players become increasingly important and there is a significant increase in the importance of peer relationships. An important aspect to note here is the learning of industry. Learners formulate plans and learn the value of success in their carrying out of such plans. It is possible that learners may observe role players and models making use of relationally aggressive behaviours to attain goals and also observe the reward of relationally aggression behaviour when such behaviour had achieved the set goal. Learners then formulate similar strategies when finding themselves in similar situations to those that had been observed. Relational aggression is likely to be successful and is most often rewarded

as an effective and subtle form of aggression and may be perceived by learners as successful when the aggressor escapes detection and punishment for the acts committed.

This study was conducted in the middle childhood developmental phase. Learners in the intermediate phase typically comprise of children in the middle childhood phase. There are several characteristics which appear in middle childhood and needs mention as such characteristics may enable better understanding of the typical learner in this study.

Firstly, regarding cognition, according to Piaget (as in McLeod, 2009:1) children in middle childhood construct knowledge as they experience responses to their experiences. They are able to learn certain behaviours and skills without the help of adults or teachers and are furthermore intrinsically motivated to learn. Children are also able to make use of inductive reasoning. This entails that they learn through observation and are able to make conclusions about what they observe and apply it to similar situations. Thus, based on one or two observations, they may draw a general conclusion about such behaviours etc (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2009:294).

In conclusion, each theory has specific views on the development of relational aggression as it pertains to this study. Several theories provide evidence that relational aggression amongst intermediate phase learners develop from cognition regarding aggressive behaviour. Relational aggression may be foremost a learned behaviour, modelled by rolemodels that learners observe. The Social Information Processing theory, the Social Domain theory as well as the Developmental theory all provide evidence of cognitive scripts that may lead to the learning of relational aggression. The Social Learning theory provides evidence for the possibility that relational aggression is related to gender role identification and the Subjective Culture theory posits that each cultural group has specific attributes that allow for the development or inhabitation of aggression. Finally, theories that allow for the understanding of the environment of learners such as the Ecological Systems theory and the General Aggression Model, provide another view of the influence of the environment on the development of relational aggression of learners during middle childhood.

2.4 SUMMARY

In Chapter Two, I presented the conceptual framework for the study. The conceptual framework discussed the literature on relational aggression. These influences include gender differences, ethnic identity, socio-economic status and age as an influence on relational aggression. The second part of this chapter presented the theoretical framework of this study and included a discussion of several theories related to relational aggression namely: the Social Information Processing theory, the General Aggression Model, the Developmental Theory, the Social Learning Theory, the Theory of Subjective Culture, the Social Domain Theory, the Ecological Systems Theory and the Psycho-social Theory of Development.

In the following chapter, I present a detailed account of the research design and the methodology I used in this research study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

In this chapter, I will provide a description of the research design, which includes the qualitative and exploratory nature of the study as well as the methods used. I will then discuss the ethical measures taken to ensure trustworthiness, the sampling, data collection strategies and data analysis strategies

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research design was chosen in order to explore and describe the perceptions and experiences of relational aggression of particular intermediate phase learners at metropolitan and rural primary schools.

3.1.1 Qualitative study

Qualitative research allows the researcher to develop a holistic view of the chosen phenomenon as it occurs in its natural context (Creswell, 2007:37; Ivankova, Creswell, Plano Clark, 2007:257). As Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:5) explain, qualitative researchers seek meaning, more specifically, the social meanings that people attribute to their experiences and situations (Denscombe, 2009:104), such as relational aggression. By collecting data using several types of data collection strategies including, peer nomination, field notes, observation and semi-structured individual interviews, I was able to categorise the data into themes, making a clearer understanding of the phenomenon possible (Creswell, 2007:38).

I purposively selected learners in the intermediate phase of primary schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of the North West province to participate in semi-structured individual interviews after a peer nomination process (Field *et al.*, 2009:56; Smith *et al.*, 2010:252). Learners who were selected had all experienced or used a form of relational aggression.

3.1.2 Exploratory nature of the study

Research into the phenomenon of relational aggression is still in its infancy (Prinstein *et al.*, 2001:479; French *et al.*, 2002:1143). In this study I set out to investigate this

phenomenon as perceived and experienced by particular intermediate phase primary school learners in South Africa.

I made use of semi-structured individual interviews which allowed the participants to share their views and opinions regarding relational aggression. This is particularly important when interviewing children. As Marvasti (2004:25) emphasises, it is important not to exploit children's inherent innocence or take advantage of their naivety. One way of avoiding this kind of exploitation is to ensure that the research contributes to the community or society the children come from in some way. This study does so in the form of the guidelines it offers (Marvasti, 2004:25). The process of interviewing the learners may also encourage them to do some form of self reflection. This could contribute to their becoming more empowered citizens in their schools and communities.

3.1.3 Descriptive nature of the study

The term 'descriptive' is used is to denote that a careful record is made of the phenomenon the researcher investigates (Creswell, 2007:245). In this study, learners who were perceived as relationally aggressive by their peers were nominated in an anonymous peer nomination process. The identified learners took part in semi-structured individual interviews during which these participants shared their experiences and perceptions of relational aggression with me. These semi-structured individual interviews yielded data which I used to make sense of the phenomenon of relational aggression as perceived and experienced by particular intermediate phase learners. I was thus able to provide a description of the findings and results that were obtained during this study on relational aggression in the intermediate phase of primary school education.

3.1.4 Contextual nature of the study

The broad context of this case is social, as relational aggression is a social form of aggression (Crothers *et al.*, 2005:349) and it may even be experienced into adulthood (Basow *et al.*, 2007:85). The narrow context of this study is the school, more specifically the intermediate phase of a metropolitan and a rural primary school. In qualitative research such as this, it is vital to investigate the phenomenon as it occurs naturally, without any interference from the researcher, so that the participants are able to share their true perceptions and experiences (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:270).

In the following section, the research method used in this study is discussed.

3.2 RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, research was conducted in two phases. In the first phase I made use of peer nomination. Peer nomination is a process that requires the learners to nominate peers whom they perceive as having either negative or positive attributes and behaviours anonymously, which lead to the identification of the learners who are perceived by their peers as relationally aggressive (Field *et al.*, 2009:36; Geiger *et al.*, 2003:30; Werner & Grant, 2009:84; Young *et al.*, 2006:297).

In phase two of the research process, participants took part in semi-structured individual interviews. During the semi-structured individual interviews the learners explained how they perceived and experienced relational aggression. These interviews yielded the data that I used for data analysis.

3.2.1 Ethical aspects

Babbie (2007:62) describes 'ethics' as a something which is typically associated with morals and questions regarding what is right and wrong. During a research process, the researcher is in a relationship with the participant(s) and is therefore required to be responsible in her conduct as part of this relationship, in which ethical guidelines play an important role (Marvasti, 2004:132). Any person who conducts research needs to ensure that the study adheres to a set of ethics which are widely accepted by the research world (Denscombe, 2009:56; Punch, 2006:56). In this study, I obtained ethical clearance from the NWU and I adhered to the following ethical requirements for the duration of this study.

3.2.1.1 Informed consent

Marvasti (2004:139) states that in order to ensure that basic ethical principles are addressed, the use of the 'informed consent model' is of utmost importance. Participants should not be misinformed regarding the purpose of the study. It was my responsibility to inform the participants in an honest manner about the purpose of the study (Denscombe, 2009:60). Informed consent in this study included written and oral explanations of the study and the aims of the study (Creswell, 2007:133). The School Governing Body of both primary schools, the principals, the teachers in the intermediate phase, the parents of the learners in the intermediate phase, including

the learners who were selected for participation in both the peer nomination and semi-structured individual interviews, were briefed on the study and its purpose, both orally and on the letters of consent that was required from all the involved parties. Letters of consent were obtained from the NWU Ethics committee, the North West Department of Education, the participating primary schools, the parents and the learners who were purposively selected for participation. In order to avoid any feelings of discomfort or stress, all participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty (Denscombe, 2009:64). Informed consent forms were handed to all parties and participants prior to data collection in any form (see Annexure C, D, F and G).

3.2.1.2 Voluntary participation and privacy

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. In this study learners who were purposefully selected to participate were informed that they could withdraw at any time and were not forced either physically or psychologically (Marvasti, 2004:135) to disclose information that they felt they did not want to share with me. In social research such as this study, participants are required to share personal feelings, opinions and situations with the researcher who is essentially a stranger (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:521), therefore it was important to ensure that the participants were fully aware of their right to withhold information or withdraw from the study completely at any time without reproach.

3.2.1.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

One of the foremost responsibilities of the social researcher is to ensure that no harm comes to any of the participants and that there is no invasion of privacy (Punch, 2006:56). To address this issue, I took care to ensure confidentiality and anonymity (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:523). In this study my supervisor and I were the only parties with access to the names of the participants. Furthermore, the names of the participants were omitted in the transcripts of the semi-structured individual interviews (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:523). These transcripts remained my property, but were in the safekeeping of my supervisor. The identity of the schools and participants therefore was protected at all times.

3.2.1.4 Benefit to the research participants

The participants of this study did not receive any form of monetary remuneration for their participation. However, to ensure the relationship was mutually beneficial to both parties (Marvasti, 2004:138), I used the findings to create guidelines which inform learners about relational aggression and provide them with strategies to manage situations involving relational aggression in primary schools. During the interviews the learners who participated were offered the opportunity to express their views and opinions and allowed to voice their perceptions and lived experiences of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools.

3.2.2 Measures to ensure trustworthiness

This study ensured reliability by making use of multiple data collection strategies namely; peer nomination, field notes, observation and semi-structured individual interviews (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:80). Guba's model for validity was used in this study and the four criteria used to ensure trustworthiness were: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality and is summarized and explained in Table 3.1 below.

TABLE 3.1 Strategies to establish and ensure trustworthiness

CRITERIA	STRATEGY	CRITERIA
Truth value	Credibility	• Prolonged engagement: I continued to collect data until data saturation occurred. • Triangulation: This study made use of multiple data collection strategies such as: peer nomination, field notes, observations and semi-structured individual interviews. Such strategies provided the perceptions of relational aggression from different participating individual learners. • Referential adequacy: Audio-records of interviews were used in this study. • Member checking: Participants' intention with responses was checked in both data and interpretation thereof by the researcher.

Applicability	Transferability	• Thick description: I attempted to ensure that descriptions were rich in detail. • Purposive sampling: In order to attain rich information from those able to share their lived experiences, participants in this study were peer nominated.
Consistency	Dependability	• Triangulation of data was done by means of crystallisation. • Coding: Independent coders were used after the researcher's initial coding process.
Neutrality	Confirmability	• Raw data were made available to independent coders. • Material relating to intentions and dispositions: the research proposal, as well as the questions used during peer nominations (see annexure B), the peer nomination sheets and transcripts of semi-structured individual interviews was made available. • Interview development information: Consent and assent forms, interview schedules and interview questions remain available.

(Adapted from Babbie & Mouton, 2009:277; Botha, 2006:35; Goodlam-Babee *et al.*, 2005:577; Krefting, 1990:217).

3.2.3 Sampling

In this study I made use of both random and purposive sampling. The selection of the two primary schools was done by means of randomly selecting two primary schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda district. Denscombe (2003:15) explains that purposive sampling is applied to samples where the researcher knows that the participants are suitable for the study. The predetermined criteria that was required of participants was that they needed to be nominated as relationally aggressive by their peers, which ensured that I obtained the necessary data from the participants during the data collection process of this study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:79). By making use of purposive sampling I ensured that the participants were specifically those from whom I could collect the relevant data, which allowed me to understand the lived experience of relational aggression amongst learners in the Intermediate Phase of

primary school education (Denscombe, 2009:178). Participants were thus selected with a specific purpose in mind namely exploring, understanding and describing the perceptions and experiences of relational aggression as it manifests in the Intermediate Phase of primary school education. By making use of purposive sampling I ensured that the participants provided me with the required data regarding relational aggression (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:213). Denscombe (2003:17) furthermore agrees that purposive sampling is beneficial as it illuminates research questions very specifically, as in this study, and it is a very informative method of data collection. It was also not necessary to have a large sample, so I selected only learners who were nominated as relationally aggressive by their peers (Denscombe, 2009:178).

3.2.4 Data collection strategies

In this study, data were collected in two phases in order to explore, understand and to describe the phenomenon of relational aggression, as it is perceived and experienced by learners in the Intermediate phase of primary school education.

3.2.4.1 Phase one: Peer nomination

During phase one I made use of anonymous peer nomination. Peer nomination is a common tool used by researchers who are interested in the identification of learners who are perceived by their peers as relationally aggressive (Kistner *et al.*, 2010:285; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009:732; Williams *et al.*, 2009:491). The process of peer nomination entailed my handing out a clean class list to each participating learner in the intermediate phase. Learners responded to a set of questions (see Annexure B) by writing the number of the question down next to the name of the learner with whom the nominating learner most associated the behaviour or the attribute in the question with (Young *et al.*, 2006:299). Peer nomination in this study served two purposes. Firstly, it allowed me to identify the relationally aggressive learners, as perceived by their peers, in the Intermediate Phase. Secondly, it allowed me to view the learners' perceptions of their peers regarding relational aggression (Geiger *et al.*, 2003:29). Young *et al.* (2006:299) add that by making use of peer nomination to identify relationally aggressive children, the researcher is provided with a clearer and much more accurate finding, than when other methods are used, since relational aggression is a more subtle form of aggression and often occurs under the radar of the teachers and parents (Geiger *et al.*, 2003:29; Young *et al.*, 2006:300).

3.2.4.2 Phase two: Semi-structured individual interviews

In phase two, the learners who were identified during the peer nomination process as relationally aggressive were purposively selected for participation in semi-structured individual interviews with the researcher (see Addendum J). The use of such interviews allowed me to use a question as a departure point and also to respond to the answer that the participant gave. In this study I posed the question: “How would you get back at someone whom you have a problem with, without getting caught?” I used the responses to continue the interview. Thus I was able to explore, understand and describe the learners’ perceptions and experiences of relational aggression. Making use of probing methods and questioning techniques, I was able to create opportunities for the participants to share information regarding the use of relational aggression and their perceptions regarding relational aggression, the precise data that I required from the participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:88). This resulted in 25 semi-structured individual interviews. I continued to conduct interviews until data saturation occurred.

3.2.4.3 Field notes

Greeff (2011:372) explains that field notes are the ‘written account’ of the experiences, thoughts as well as the sensory experiences of the researcher. Also included in the field notes of this study were the observations made by me throughout the data collection process. These made up a part of the raw data for analysis.

Field notes were useful and provided me with a more comprehensive and holistic perspective of the phenomenon of relational aggression, which was being studied (Strydom, 2011:337). It allowed me to gain insight into the context in which the phenomenon is found and allowed for better understanding and provided insight into the phenomenon of relational aggression amongst intermediate phase learners, which could not be recorded in another way during the data collection process (Strydom, 2011:337). Four types of field notes were relevant in this study, namely: observational, methodological, theoretical and reflective and personal notes.

3.2.4.3.1 *Observational notes*

Observational notes refer to the observations made by the researcher, containing the descriptions of the environment, participants and physical influences in the context of the study. These notes were made during the data collection process.

3.2.4.3.2 *Methodological notes*

Field notes termed 'methodological notes' refer to notes that pertain to the methodology of the study. In this study such notes included notes regarding the utility of sampling, the data collection process and the analysis methods used in this study.

3.2.4.3.3 *Theoretical notes*

Theoretical notes pertain to the notes relating to the theories used to provide the theoretical framework for the study. Such notes in this study also allowed me to bracket my bias as a teacher and to focus on the research question of the study.

3.2.4.3.4 *Personal and reflective notes*

The personal notes of this study are a record of my thoughts and actions during the research process and included thoughts of the participants and environment of the school in which I conducted the research. Reflective notes are written accounts of the emotions of the researcher. They include mention of prejudices, feelings at the time of the research process and thus have a personal flavour.

The discussion of the above-mentioned field notes are provided in Chapter Five, section 5.3.

3.2.5 **Data analysis**

According to Creswell (2007:149) data analysis consists of preparing, organising and interpreting raw data for analysis, and then making use of coding strategies to make sense of them so they can be presented in a logical manner. Analysis is explained by Boeije (2010:76) as a process which consists of two basic activities. Firstly, the data needs to be segmented into separate parts. Secondly, the data is reassembled to allow the researcher to identify patterns and relationships between parts of the data, and to provide insight into the phenomenon being studied.

This study was a qualitative phenomenological study which required qualitative data analysis. After investigation, I determined that the most suitable approach to data analysis in this study was open coding. Babbie and Mouton (2009:499) explains open coding as a form of coding which allowed me to segment the text into different categories. The raw data consisted of peer nomination sheets, field notes, observations and audio-records as well as transcripts of the semi-structured individual interviews.

The semi-structured individual interviews made up the bulk of the raw data and were transcribed by me. I made use of open coding to establish emergent themes, categories and subcategories. Boeije (2010:95) defines a theme as 'the matter with which the data is mainly concerned' and a category as 'a group or cluster used to sort part of the data during analysis'. Open coding entails breaking down the text, carefully comparing segments and assigning a theme to each segment of importance (Boeije, 2010:96). The use of open coding allows the researcher to maintain an analytic approach to the raw data as it is being compared and assigned into categories under the two emergent themes (Boeije, 2010:96). In this study, open coding was completed by independent coders as well as by me. I made use of Tesch's Model to guide the coding process. Creswell (2009:186) describes the model in the following steps.

- All the transcripts were read as a whole. This enabled me to gain an understanding of the entire set of data.
- One of the transcripts were chosen and read. The selected transcript is one of interesting substance and thoughts about this were written in the margin.
- The same process was followed for a number of transcripts. A list of all the emergent topics were written and clustered together where similar topics was found. The topics were placed into columns under the headings major topics, unique topics and left over topics.
- This list was used when I returned to the data. The topics were abbreviated and were written in the margin of the transcripts. This process allowed me to identify new themes and codes.
- Topics were studied and more appropriate terms for the topics were written. Categories were reduced by grouping similar categories together. Interrelationships were also indicated in this step.
- A final abbreviation for each category was determined and the categories were listed alphabetically.

- The material from the text was placed under each appropriate category and preliminary analysis was done by me.
- The existing data was then recoded to ensure that the process had been successful and that the entire process had been conducted in a thorough manner.

The raw data, the initial codes and my other findings were sent to independent coders for coding purposes. A consensus meeting was held during which the independent coders and I agreed on the emergent themes, categories and subcategories.

3.2.6 Comparison of findings with the literature

The purpose of comparing the findings of this study with the findings in the existing literature on relational aggression was to validate the findings of the study (Mouton, 2005:6). The existing literature also enabled me to select an appropriate research design and methodology and to study the findings of other researchers who had researched the phenomenon of relational aggression. I used internet academic search engines like EBSCOHOST and SABINET to locate multiple sources of literature including books and journals. Search terms used to locate research on these search engines were: 'aggression', 'indirect aggression', 'social aggression', 'relational aggression', 'perception', 'learners', 'rural', 'metropolitan' and 'experience'. The existing research findings were all from international studies. The literature consulted was used to test the merit of the findings which emerged from this study. The theory and literature used in this study thus promoted confidence in the results of the study.

3.2.7 The purpose of the description of guidelines

At the end of the study I made use of the literature, theories and the data collected in the study to develop guidelines that will be distributed to the primary schools that were selected to participate in the study, the district office of the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Department of Education, as well as the Department of Basic Education in the North West province. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide learners in the intermediate phase with information on relational aggression. The guidelines furthermore aim to teach learners skills which could be helpful in the management of relational aggression amongst peers. These would be custom designed as recommended by Field *et al.* (2009:56). In this case of relational aggression, physical

intervention would be impractical due to the covert nature of relational aggression; therefore, guidelines for learners seemed the best alternative to inform learners in the intermediate phase and develop their ability to manage relational aggression.

Since the guidelines distributed should be in a linguistic style which learners could readily understand, the guidelines were written and compiled specifically for use by learners in the intermediate phase (Field *et al.*, 2009:56).

Enabling learners to cope with such instances would ultimately contribute to the development of a positive school climate which in turn could reduce the prevalence of relational aggression in the intermediate phase of primary school (Young, Nelson, Hottle, Warburton & Young, 2011:25). Educational research aims to bring about change, and the use of guidelines developed in this study could enable learners and teachers to bring about change in the management of relational aggression in the school context.

3.3 SUMMARY

In Chapter Three, I described the qualitative nature of this exploratory study including the research design and the research method used. I also discussed the ethical aspects of the study, the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness, and the strategies used to obtain a purposive sample as well as to collect and process the data.

In Chapter Four, I will discuss the results and findings of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION OF LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN METROPOLITAN AND RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the results of the research in this study are presented and discussed. During the data analysis of the research, themes, categories and sub-categories were identified and the discussion of the results was structured accordingly. Relevant literature is incorporated into the discussion of the results as well as verbatim quotations from the semi-structured individual interviews (see annexure J for biographical details of participants). Next I highlight salient features of my field notes. In conclusion of this chapter, I provide a summary of the chapter.

4.1.1 Data Analysis

Phenomenological semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with learners who were identified as relationally aggressive learners through a process of anonymous peer nomination (described in Section 3.2.4.1) from two purposively selected metropolitan and rural primary schools.

All participants were presented with the same question at the beginning of the interview: "How would you get back at someone you are angry with, without the teacher finding out?" The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me and the transcripts were verified by two independent coders. The independent coders and I reached consensus after a thorough discussion of the findings. The research findings reported in the literature were used to support the findings of this study.

4.1.2 Discussion of results

After the data analysis process, two themes were identified in the data on the learners' perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools. The results of this study are presented under these two emergent themes, which are divided into categories and sub-categories on which the independent coders and I had reached agreement. The themes, categories and sub-categories

have been summarised schematically in Table 4.1. The discussion of the results follows.

TABLE 4.1 Schematic summary of identified themes, categories and sub-categories which articulate learners’ perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools.

4.2 THEME ONE: LEARNERS EXPERIENCE RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN DIFFERENT WAYS
Category 1 4.2.1 Learners’ experience of relational aggression is influenced by their social contexts
Sub-categories 4.2.1.1 Learners associate relational aggression with a lack of supervision by teachers. 4.2.1.2 Learners use relational aggression as a tool to manipulate their peer relationships in a direct and indirect manner. 4.2.1.3 Learners associate their experiences of relationally aggressive acts with learners who seem popular and well-known to other learners. 4.2.1.4 Learners experience relational aggression as a way of retaliation which is justified. 4.2.1.5 Learners experience that negative responses towards aggressors encourage further acts of relational aggression.
Category 2 4.2.2 Learners are aware of the influence of the presence of the teacher on relationally aggressive learners
Sub-categories 4.2.2.1 Learners perceive teachers as unaware of relationally aggressive learners. 4.2.2.2 Learners experience teachers to have misconceptions about relationally

aggressive learners.

4.2.2.3 Learners who are perceived as relationally aggressive maintain their reputation for good behaviour.

Category 3

4.2.3 Learners describe their peers' parents who are employed at school as a contributing factor to their children's relationally aggressive behaviour

Sub-categories

4.2.3.1 Learners experience direct parental involvement of their peers' parents as a form of protection.

4.2.3.2 Learners involve their parents in conflict situations at school.

Category 4

4.2.4 Learners experience relational aggression in a group bound context

Sub-categories

4.2.4.1 Relational aggression is used as a means of controlling peer groups.

4.2.4.2 Victims of peer groups' relationally aggressive behaviours experience intense emotions.

4.2.4.3 Learners are aware of the hierarchies within peer groups.

4.2.4.4 Learners experience group identity as more important than their own individual identity.

4.2.4.5 Relational aggression is employed in direct and indirect ways.

4.3 THEME TWO: LEARNERS ARTICULATE MEASURES TO MANAGE RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

Category 1

4.3.1 Learners suggest ways of how to deal with relational aggression

Sub-categories
4.3.1.1 Learners suggest that aggressors should be approached and confronted.
4.3.1.2 Learners suggest personal relaxation, reflective thinking or ignoring the aggressor as ways to deal with relationally aggressive learners.
4.3.1.3 Learners suggest that a person of authority needs to be informed about relationally aggressive acts.
Category 2
4.3.2 Learners experience their religious and personal values as issues which influence the way in which relational aggression is managed

Results are discussed in detail and verbatim quotations from the interviews are used to support the selected themes and categories. Verbatim quotations are followed by relevant literature to substantiate the findings. The italic quotations in this section are verbatim. It should be noted that some were less articulate than others.

4.2 THEME ONE: LEARNERS EXPERIENCE RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN DIFFERENT WAYS

The first theme indicates that the participants experience relational aggression in different ways and in diverse social contexts. Firstly, learners' experience of relational aggression is influenced by the different social contexts in which the research was conducted. The second category indicates that learners are aware that relationally aggressive learners are influenced by the presence of teachers. Thirdly, learners see parents who are employed by the school as contributing to their children's relationally aggressive behaviour. In this theme, the final category indicates that learners generally experience relational aggression in a group context. Literature that substantiates the findings is cited after the discussion of the verbatim quotations.

4.2.1 Category 1: Learners' experience of relational aggression is influenced by their social contexts.

In this category, the findings indicate that learners' experience of relational aggression is influenced by their social contexts. Several sub-categories emerged.

Firstly, learners associate relational aggression with a lack of supervision by the teachers. Secondly, learners use relational aggression to manipulate peer relationships, both directly and indirectly. Thirdly, learners associate their experiences of relationally aggressive acts with learners who seem popular among other learners. Fourthly, learners experience relational aggression as a justifiable means of retaliation. Finally, learners experience that negative responses towards aggressors encourage further acts of relational aggression.

4.2.1.1 Learners associate relational aggression with a lack of supervision by teachers.

"... en hulle (die onderwysers) is nie pouses by nie ..." (they [the teachers] are not around during breaks) (Participant 5: White female).

"... as ek pouses kyk hoe sy ('n aggressiewe leerder) speel, sien ek hoe sy die kinders wat jonger as sy is seer maak en soek moeilikheid met die ander ..." (during breaks when I see how she [an aggressive learner] plays, I see how she hurts the children that are younger than her and looks for trouble with others) (Participant 12: White female).

"...sy (the aggressor) sal in die klas (wanneer die onderwyseres nie daar is nie) sommer vir jou sê whatever..." (she [the aggressor] will just say whatever to you in class [when the teacher is not present]) (Participant 5: White female).

"... ek sal pouse na hulle ('n groep kinders waarmee die deelnemer nie speel nie) toe gaan want hulle is mos nou by hulle tjommies ..." (I will go to them [a group of children who the participant does not play with] during break because they are now with their friends) (Participant 6: White male).

"... pouses sal hulle ('n groep aggressiewe leerders) sommer die kinders terg en dan slaan..." (during breaks they [a group of aggressive learners] will just tease and then hit the children) (Participant 13: White female).

"... hy (die aggressor) loop pouse rond en soek moeilikheid met almal ..." (He [the aggressor] walks around during break and looks for trouble with everyone) (Participant 13: White female).

“...they will rather sit and gossip...and that person angry and that person will tell them...when the school close, me and you...to that grounds...” (Participant 24: Black female).

It appears that the participants experience most instances of relational aggression when there is little or no supervision by teachers, specifically during their break times. This is a time where the learners interact with each other on their own and when there is no need for appearances to be kept up. During these interactions, it is more than likely that problems or conflict situations will be encountered. Relational aggression is covert in nature and thus the lack of teacher supervision during break creates an ideal opportunity for learners to engage in relationally aggressive behaviours for example; threats, insults and social isolation. Charging senior learners with acting as leaders may in some cases simply facilitate such behaviours. Furthermore, it seems that the participants are aware that such instances occur during their break times and are thus accustomed to seeing this type of behaviour when they are in their social groups. Another finding indicates that learners who may display relational aggression, such as some of those who are quoted above, also observe relational aggression during break times, which could possibly lead to them choosing to behave in a similar way, should these observed perpetrators not be punished for their break time behaviour.

Merritt-Gray (2007:1) explains that relational aggression is covert aggression which is difficult for adults to observe as these acts are committed ‘under the radar’ of adult supervision. These acts are committed in such a subtle way that adults, especially teachers are not aware of them (Wilkinson, 2008:3). Dixon-Rayle, Moorhead, Green, Griffen and Ozimek (2007:32) claim that relational aggression is most likely to occur at school as this is where children spend the majority of their time with each other, making break times an opportune time to engage in acts that would not be possible when there is teacher supervision (Fekkes, Pijpers & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005:88; Paris, 2006:8). This indicates the need to make teachers aware of the prevalence of such acts, and to address the problem by making teachers more visible during break times instead of putting learners in a position where they are unsupervised, or when the supervision is not adequate.

4.2.1.2 Learners use relational aggression as a tool to manipulate their peer relationships in a direct and indirect manner.

"Hulle mag dit (speel met ander leerders) nie doen nie want sy (die leier van die spesifieke groep) sê so." (They may not do it [play with other learners] because she [leader of the specific group] says so) (Participant 14: White male).

"Hy (die aggressor) pers my af en sê hy gaan vir die ander (in die leerder se vriendekring) sê hoe skinder ek" (He [the aggressor] blackmails me and says that he will tell the others [in the learner's circle of friends] how I gossip).
(Participant 8: White female).

"I ask my friend, why don't you talk to me...then she say, no, you talk to that other girl...and you were laughing." (Participant 24: Black female).

"Daar is kinders wat bang is om weg te loop van die groepie af" (there are children who are scared to walk leave the group) (Participant 8: White female).

"As ek soontoe gaan (na 'n spesifieke groep leerders) sê sy (die leier van die groep) vir my ek beter vinnig loop want ek mag nie daar rond staan nie ..." (when I go there [a specific group of learners] she [the leader of the group] tells me that I had better walk quickly as I may not stand around there) (Participant 8: White female).

"You must talk with your friends and tell them to do this and this..." (Participant 24: Black female).

Relational aggression seems to be used by learners as a way to manipulate peer relationships in a direct and indirect manner. Learners are aware of the power of relationally aggressive acts and appear to be fearful of such acts being committed if they were to be in the position of victim. Learners who admit to committing such acts acknowledge the sense of power it gives them, and note how easy it seems to be to commit such acts, especially against learners who are in a social group not considered acceptable by other learners. Learners who find themselves in a clique are fearful of 'disobeying' the rules of the specific group or of leaving the group. One participant explained that other learners were aware that learners who are in certain groups were off limits to other learners to engage with socially, and would generally not be spoken to by outsiders.

Relationally aggressive acts is a tool used to manipulate peer relationships as they are employed to hurt or control groups and cliques (Ludwig, 2007:31). These acts are employed within a peer group, often by the most dominant member of the group, to ensure that learners are 'obedient' to this member (Ludwig, 2007:31). SooHoo (2009:1) found that girls often make use of relationally aggressive behaviour to determine or show which peers are accepted into more elite groups and who is not included. These acts are used to lower the social status of the victim, therefore ensuring that others will not willingly leave or enter the group unless they want to be the object of the same humiliating behaviour. Reynolds and Repetti (2010:284) also conclude that relational aggression is used to manipulate peer relationships for reasons such as humiliation, entertainment and boredom. Girls are particularly vulnerable to relational aggression as their need to belong to a group of friends during middle childhood is extremely important. This is a time when they are developing their social and personal identities and thus they experience an increasing need for peer acceptance (De Vencentis, 2010:11). Often, girls would become friends with a known aggressor or become an aggressor themselves, to guard against being socially excluded. In some instances, this is a form of protection from other peers aiming such acts at them (De Vencentis, 2010:11). Being in a group and engaging in relational aggression may also lead to a feeling of connectedness amongst the peers of that particular group. It may also help to make outsiders see them as popular or see the group as exclusive (Dixon-Rayle *et al.*, 2007:33).

4.2.1.3 Learners associate their experiences of relationally aggressive acts with learners who seem popular and well-known to other learners

"... maar die kinders weet (wie die aggresssiewe leerders is) ..." (but the children know [who the aggressive learners are] (Participant 7: White male).

"Sy kry dit altyd reg om die baas (van die groep) te wees." (she always manages to be the boss [of the group]) (Participant 8: White female).

"... toe praat ek met een van die meisies daar en toe sê sy ek moenie met haar praat nie ... sy is te popular vir my om met haar te praat ..." (then I spoke to one of the girls there and then she said that I must not talk to her... she is too popular for me to talk to her) (Participant 9: White female).

“Daar is meisies wat gewild is omdat hulle met die ander lelik is” (there are girls who are popular because they are nasty to others) (Participant 9: White female).

The power of relationally aggressive acts is evident from the quotations above. It appears that the participants who are known to commit relationally aggressive acts are generally popular children who are well-known in their grades. Although they are very selective in their choice of friends and acquaintances, the other learners in the grade are aware of their relationally aggressive behaviours and would avoid crossing them or interacting with them. There appears to be a learner in the grade who is ‘in charge’ of the more popular girls and controls the social behaviour of that specific group which is perceived by other learners as exclusive. There is also a perception that girls who are mean and commit acts of relational aggression are popular. This may be due to the fear that other learners, who are not considered as popular, have of experiencing such acts. They thus prefer to be nice or friendly to the learners who are known to be relationally aggressive, so they can avoid getting on their bad side and becoming the target of their relationally aggressive acts.

Research has indicated that during middle childhood children make use of several forms of relational aggression. These learners were perceived by other learners as more popular (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004:147). It seems that once learners have gained popularity amongst their peers, their use of relational aggression increases. Self-reports indicated that making use of relationally aggressive behaviours, allows the aggressor to retain dominance and influence over a particular peer group. During middle childhood, it appears that children who were known for committing acts of relational aggression were well liked by their peers, even though their behaviour were at times perceived by peers as questionable (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004:147). Girls who are known to commit acts of relational aggression were found to be in charge of the peer relationships in their groups and claimed to have a ‘feeling of power’ (Wilkenson, 2008:2). Ripley and O’Neil (2009:14) explains that children who are relationally aggressive are generally not intimidated by peers in their classes and can ensure that their friends can do what they want them to, mainly out of their peers’ fear of them. Hendry (2012:8) found that relational aggression is positively associated with popularity and power within the peer group. Relationally aggressive learners are often considered powerful by their peers, and may even be perceived by most peers to have positive characteristics which seem, in some cases, to outweigh their negative attributes (Hendry, 2012:8).

4.2.1.4 Learners experience relational aggression as a way of retaliation which is justified.

“Ek kan hom (die aggressor) sleg sê of so iets doen.” (I could say nasty things about him or do something like that) (Participant 6: White male).

“Ek gaan net sê (vir die juffrou) sy het dit begin.” (I will just say [to the teacher] that she started it) (Participant 2: White female).

“Ek sal iets vir hom (die aggressor) sê of so iets. ... maar ek sal hom terug kry.” (I will say something to him [the aggressor] or something like that ... but I will get him back) (Participant 3: White male).

“As jy skinder, skinder hulle (die ander leerders in jou vriendekring) van jou ook.” (If you gossip, they [the other learners in your circle of friends] will gossip about you too) (Participant 4: White male).

“Ek het vir ... (naam) geterg want hy sê soms lelike goed van my.” (I teased ... [name] because sometimes he says nasty things about me) (Participant 19: White male).

It seems likely from the quotations, that participants will make use of relational aggression as a means to get back at another learner who may have aggressed toward the learner. Learners justify their acts by simply stating that they were provoked and retaliatory behaviours like relational aggression is then seen as a justified form of retaliation. In such cases the participants admit that they are likely to behave in this way as a means of retaliation. Retaliation may also not be immediate. In some cases the participants justified acts of relational aggression by stating that an earlier event led to their acts of relationally aggressive behaviour.

Reynolds and Repetti (2010:283) explain that acts of aggression can be either reactive or proactive in nature. Reactive aggression is aimed at retaliating after a perceived (whether the intent of the act was hostile or not) act of aggression. This retaliation may be due to a perceived transgression on a previous occasion and could be premeditated. Acts of relational aggression often occur as a form of revenge on a peer who has committed an act that may have been perceived as negative or may have been a purposeful act committed to cause harm to another (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:284). Reynolds and Repetti (2010:293) also indicate that revenge was one of the most common reasons given for using relational aggression, both by learners who self-reported acts of relational aggression as well as the victims. It has

also been found that girls are more likely than boys to retaliate when they feel they have been wronged (Azmita, Kamprath & Linnet, 2006:18).

4.2.1.5 Learners experience that negative responses towards aggressors encourage further acts of relational aggression.

"... the teachers do nothing then I smack him if he say bad things to me ..."
(Participant 21: Black male).

"... ek sal die selfde ding aan hom doen as wat hy aan my gedoen het ..." (I will do the same thing to him that he has done to me)... (Participant 6: White male).

"they will rather sit and gossip about that person...then that person will get angry and will say...after school, on those grounds...then they bully each other..." (Participant 24: Black female).

"Hulle skree op my en dan sê ek ek is nie doof nie... en ek sal haar terug stamp as sy aanhou (met haar aggressiewe gedrag)." (They scream at me and then I say I am not deaf ... I will bump her back if she carries on [with her aggressive behaviour])
(Participant 13: White female).

The above statements indicate that a negative reaction to a confrontation may lead directly to an act of retaliation which most often results in acts of physical aggression or continued relationally aggressive acts by both parties. It is necessary to note that there is a biblical reference in one of the quotations which is used to justify the behaviour. Participants seem to feel that there is no reason not to react negatively to provocation if the teachers do not support the victim or if there is not sufficient intervention to leading to a resolution of the conflict. One participant stated that he would do the same to the aggressor as what the aggressor did to him, which indicated a figurative 'eye for an eye', while another participant indicated that he would physically retaliate if he was insulted or if a peer made use of relationally aggressive behaviours in which he was the target.

In self-reports, retaliation or 'getting back at someone' was found to be one of the more frequently explanations given by relationally aggressive learners for relationally aggressive behaviour (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:290). Markham (2010:5) explains that often acts of relational aggression, especially amongst boys lead to acts of physical aggression as a means of revenge or retaliation. Literature also indicated

that direct acts of relational aggression are usually reported as a responding behaviour after provocation (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:290). Direct forms of relational aggression appear to be an immediate response to perceived provocation, whereas other forms of relational aggression were more likely to occur later, perhaps after planning the act and ensuring it would achieve the goal the aggressor had in mind (Xie *et al.*, 2002:220).

4.2.2 Category 2: Learners are aware of the influence of the presence of the teacher on relationally aggressive learners

In the second category, learners indicated that they were aware of that the teacher's presence influenced the behaviour of relationally aggressive learners. Learners had a strong perception that the teachers of the grade or class were unaware or completely ignorant of which learners were likely to commit acts of relational aggression. Secondly, the learners indicated that, in their experience, teachers have misconceptions regarding relationally aggressive learners. Finally, they revealed that learners who were perceived as well-behaved by their teachers, but were, in fact, relationally aggressive learners were able to maintain their reputation for behaving well in class, specifically when the teacher was present.

4.2.2.1 Learners perceive teachers as unaware of relationally aggressive learners

"Ek dink ons (die leerders in die klas) ken die kinders beter as wat die juffrouens ons ken ..." (I think we (the learners in the class) know the children better than the teachers know us) (Participant 5: White female).

"The teachers do nothing...then I smack him..." (Participant 21: Black male).

"Juffrou weet nie eintlik van hulle (leerders wat verhoudingsaggressie toon teenoor ander) nie ..." (teacher does not actually know about them [learners known to show relationally aggressiveness towards others]) (Participant 5: White female).

"Die juffrou weet nie watse goed hulle (die aggressiewe kinders) doen tussen hulle vriende nie ..." (The teacher does not know what things they (the aggressive children) do between their friends) (Participant 8: White female).

"Juffrou het 'n idee (van wie verhoudingsaggressie toon) maar weet ook nie eintlik nie ..." (The teacher has an idea [of who shows relational aggression] but does not actually know) (Participant 10: White female).

Participants believe that the teachers are unaware of the learners who are known or perceived by other learners to be relationally aggressive. These statements by the participants imply that the participants either do not want to disclose their experiences to the teachers, or that when they do inform the teachers of such situations, the teachers either do not believe them, or do not take appropriate action. The learners appear to believe that the teachers do not know what the learners are capable of when they (the teachers) are absent (during breaks). Because of their lack of knowledge of the learners, they are unable to intervene effectively and manage the situation, should it be reported to them. There are also participants who hold the opinion that the teachers do not understand the situations or that they do not care. It may also be that the teachers have intervened before and the situation was not resolved or that their intervention just intensified the situation.

Yoon, Barton and Taiariol (2004:304) believe that because of the nature of relational aggression teachers and parents are often not aware of such acts being committed. This is in contrast to physical forms of aggression which is readily observable and thus easy to confront and manage. In the case of relational aggression, the opposite is true (Yoon *et al.*, 2004:304). Teachers are most likely not to observe acts of relational aggression as they are mostly covert, or occur where they cannot be observed by supervising adults. Yoon *et al.* (2004:305) found that learners often report that teachers are unwilling to get involved and a possible explanation for their apparent lack of interest in intervening in such situations is that they may see acts of relational aggression as simply a part of growing up and therefore transient (Yoon *et al.*, 2004:305). Ludwig (2007:32) adds to the above notion that for many years these acts have been ignored by teachers and parents alike, as the misconception of relational aggression was that it was just a phase learners go through.

Research from Denousis-Wallace and Shute (2009:4) indicated that teachers are not generally aware of the seriousness regarding allegations of relational aggression as they are most often not witness to these acts and reports are based on a 'he said she said' tale. It also came to light that teachers are less likely to intervene in situations that they feel are not truly serious (Denousis-Wallace & Shute, 2009:5) and indicate that teachers are likely to overlook or ignore claims of relational aggression, unless the aggression is committed in a direct manner. In such cases, the acts of relational aggression evoke feelings of empathy from the teacher and lead to intervention.

4.2.2.2 Learners experience teachers to have misconceptions about relationally aggressive learners.

“Hulle (leerders wat bekend is om aggressief te wees) is die soetste in die klas ...”
(They [the learners who are known to be aggressive] are the best behaved in the class) (Participant 1: White male).

“Juffrou glo nie die ander kinders (wat nie so populêr is) nie.” (The teacher does not believe the other children [who are not as popular]) (Participant 11: White male).

“Die juffrou sien net dat die kind (die aggressiewe leerder) nou (in die klas) smart is en as die juffrou daar is dan is hulle (die aggressiewe leerders) tjoepstil ...” (The teacher just sees that the child [the aggressive learner in the class] is smart and when the teacher is there they [the aggressive learners] are dead quiet) (Participant 6: White male).

“Juffrou wil ook nie eers meer luister oor hoekom ek dit (verhoudings aggressief opgetree het) gedoen het nie.” (The teacher does not even want to hear why I did [acted in a relationally aggressive manner] it) (Participant 7: White male).

The quotations above indicate that the participants who are perceived to be relationally aggressive are smart enough to keep up appearances in the presence of the teachers. Their behaviour in class is satisfactory to the teachers who witness only this aspect of the learner's behaviour. The learners who are identified as relationally aggressive are generally well behaved in class and deliver work that is of good quality and in this manner they gain the trust of the teachers. The perception of the teachers and other learners regarding relationally aggressive children are not the same and this only further enables relationally aggressive learners to continue with their behaviour unhindered by the interference of the teachers. This also indicates the highly manipulative nature of these learners. They are aware of the importance of keeping up the appearance of good behaviour and innocence in order to avoid being caught or labelled by authority figures as one who is mean or nasty to other children. Without evidence from an authority figure such accusations can simply be down played or blamed on jealousy.

Literature indicates that due to the covert nature of relational aggression, teachers are often unaware of these acts being committed. When acts of physical aggression are committed, it is readily observable due to its violent nature and teachers easily intervene. However, relationally aggressive acts are committed in such a way that

teacher cannot easily observe it, and makes it more challenging for the teachers to intervene successfully as reports of relational aggression becomes a 'he said she said' situation (Paris, 2006:11). The same study found that teachers have become more focused on dealing with aggression when boys are involved but it is more often a situation where both parties are at fault, so are not taking note of the subtle forms of aggression found among girls. The study also noted, that while reports of relational aggression are often found, teachers generally view these reports as 'just the way that children are' due to their ignorance of the impact it may have on the victims, thus allowing the aggressor to get away with these acts (Paris, 2006:13).

Perhaps, the finding by Ripley and O'Neil (2009:14) that causes most concern is that relationally aggressive girls, particularly in middle childhood, are often generally well-liked by both peers and teachers and their popularity with teachers allows the teachers to dismiss most claims of relational aggression made against them. Ripley and O'Neil (2009:14) explain that these girls are very charming to adults and are capable of explaining their way out of trouble.

4.2.2.3 Learners who are perceived as relationally aggressive maintain their reputation for good behaviour.

"Hy is die sterretjie in die klas en hy (aggressiewe leerder) sorg dat hy nie in die moeilikheid (by die juffrou) kom nie." (He [aggressive learner] makes sure that he does not get into trouble [with the teacher]) (Participant 1: White male).

"...dan is daai kind (aggressiewe leerder) soos ... wow ... ek is 'n sterretjie ..." (then that child [aggressive learner] is like ... wow ... I am a little star) (Participant 1: White male).

"... hulle (aggressiewe leerders) is die soet kinders in die klas en mens (onderwysers en leerders) dink nie hulle is so (aggressief) nie ..." (they [aggressive learners] are the well-behaved children in the class and people [teachers and learners] do not think that they are like that [aggressive]) (Participant 12: White female).

"Die juffrou hou baie van haar (aggressiewe leerder) ... maar pouse dan baklei sy met ander ... sy knou die kinders af ..." (The teacher likes her [aggressive learner] a lot ... but during break she fights with others ... she bullies the children) (Participant 17: White female).

Participants state that although they are aware of relationally aggressive learners, teachers find reports regarding these learners hard to believe. They explain that these learners are well behaved in class and do not give the slightest impression of being aggressive behaviour. One participant stated that because they are so well behaved during class time, one would never suspect them of being capable of relationally aggressive behaviours. Another participant said that the teacher is very fond of the main relational aggressor in their class, who is nasty to other learners and picks fights with them. All the participants feel that the aggressors are known to the learners but they manage to fool and deceive the teachers. Because the teachers are unaware of the behaviour of these learners, they have a misconception about them.

Literature indicates that aggressors are capable of keeping up appearances and maintaining their spotless reputations with the teachers (Ripley & O'Neil, 2009:14). Aggressors are also careful not be caught in the act and take care to be careful in their conduct with authority, particularly teachers and parents. They are unlikely to be uncooperative, but rather act in a compliant manner when dealing with any form of authority; however, their behaviour becomes ruthless when they are interacting with peers (Ripley & O'Neil, 2009:14).

Hendry (2012:8) states that aggressors are well integrated within society and have a high self-concept. Hendry (2012:8) add that these aggressors are very capable academically which further contributes to their appearances within the teachers' framework and that they are indeed able to ensure teacher approval through their behaviour when teachers are present.

4.2.3 Category 3: Learners describe their peers' parents who are employed at school as a contributing factor to their children's relationally aggressive behaviour

In this category, the research findings indicate that learners describe their peers' parents who are employed at school as a factor that contributes to their children's relationally aggressive behaviour. Learners experienced direct parental involvement from their peers' parents as a form of protection. The second sub-category indicated that learners often involve their parents in their conflict situations at school.

4.2.3.1 Learners experience direct parental involvement of their peers' parents as a form of protection.

"Sy (die ontvanger van die aggressie) is seker bang vir my (die aggressor) en vir my ma" (She [the victim of aggression] is probably scared of me [the aggressor] and my mother) (Participant 5: White female).

"Ek sal vir my ma gaan sê (van die aggressor se gedrag) sonder dat die juffrou weet ..." (I will tell my mother [about the aggressor's behaviour] without that teacher's knowledge) (Participant 12: White female).

It seems that participants perceive learners whose parents are employed at school, and so are directly involved in the school as having a form of protection which allows them to commit more acts of relational aggression: their victims are fearful of being reprimanded by these learners' parents. It would also appear that learners generally understand that involving a parent in a situation in which acts of relational aggression are involved will lead to the adult resolving the conflict in a one sided way. Participants who have experienced such a situation remain fearful of the child and the parent and do not want to engage in such acts again with that particular learner.

Duman and Margolin (2007:42) conducted a study in which participants and their parents had to respond to similar situations so the researchers could examine the relationship between the child's aggressive responses and those of their parents. The results of the study by Duman and Margolin (2007:42) indicated that children often mimic conflict-solving methods and strategies displayed by their parents, and all participants named at least one measure of relational aggression when confronted with a provocative conflict situation. The same study indicated that harsh behaviour on the parents' behalf contributed to aggression, both relational and physical, in their children (Duman & Margolin, 2007:50). The Social Learning Theory (Baron & Byrne, 2000:446; Fiske, 2010:404) supports the view that the aggression responses of children are related to their parents' choice of aggression strategy, as it is likely that children identify most strongly with their parents when learning how to behave in various social situations. One such a social situation would be a conflict situation where conflict management strategies are employed. Should one or both of the parents employ relational aggression as a means to punish a spouse for a perceived wrong, it is likely that the child will mimic such behaviour when finding themselves in a similar situation.

“... as jy vir juffrou ... (naam) sê gaan sy nie regtig iets doen nie want dis sy (die aggressor) se tannie ...” (... if you tell teacher ,... [name] she will not really do something because it is his [the aggressor’s] aunt) (Participant 13: White female).

“... die voog (voog juffrou van die klas) se kind hou van my en nou is die ander (meisies in die klas) lelik met my ...” (... the class teacher’s child likes me and now the others [girls in the class] are nasty to me) (Participant 8: White female).

It would appear that participants know that certain learners who are relationally aggressive cannot even be accused of such behaviour as they will not be reprimanded because of the involvement of their parents at school. It also seems that these learners enjoy a form of protection which is facilitated by the perception the other learners have of them and their parents. Other learners are victimized if they associate with children whose parents are employed by the school. This may be because the other learners in the class dislike these children, and are also afraid of their parents, so they project their negative feelings onto anyone these learners associate with.

Parenting skills may contribute in various ways to the facilitation of relational aggression (Brown, 2009:5). In this situation the relevance of the parents’ presence at school comes to light. The aggressor (whose parents are employed at school) may be more inclined to keep up appearances, and the employed parent’s presence may contribute to an appearance of good behaviour. When claims are made against these children, the parent is in a position where he or she can get directly involved and may even attempt to dismiss the claims of relational aggression (perhaps making use of relationally aggressive strategies themselves) before such claims reach other teachers.

4.2.3.2 Learners involve their parents in conflict situations at school.

“Ek sal my ma skool toe bring as sy (die aggressor) aangaan ...” (I will bring my mom to school if she [the aggressor] carries on) (Participant 2: White female).

“Ek dink ek moet sy (die aggressor) pa sê ... dan kan sy pa hom slaan ...” (I think I must tell his [aggressor’s] dad then his dad can hit him) (Participant 3: White male).

“In Graad 3 het haar ma (the aggressor’s mother) skool toe gekom en aan my geruk.” (In Grade 3 her mom (the aggressor’s mother) came to school and shook me) (Participant 2: White female).

"... (naam) se ma werk by die skool en as mens lelik is met haar dan is sy lelik terug maar dan gaan sy na haar ma toe en sê vir haar alles ... dan as sy (die ma) jou sien is sy (die ma) net nie mooi met jou nie ..." ([name of learner's mother] works at the school and if you are mean to her then she is mean back to you, but then she goes to her mother and she tells her everything ... then if she [the mother] sees you, she is just not nice to you) (Participant 15: White female).

"When I get home I tell my mom that someone is gossiping about me and I didn't like it." (Participant 24: Black female).

It becomes clear that participants consider it an option to involve their parents in their conflict situations at school. One participant even described reporting another child's behaviour to his (the child's) father, perhaps feeling that by doing so he did not have to deal with the conflict himself. It is also clear that if a parent is likely to engage in relational aggression, the other learners perceive it as an even greater threat than the threat the learner alone held, and now both the child and the parent is feared. Another participant recalled a parent reprimanding her physically at school after a conflict situation with her child.

Relational aggression may be facilitated by the attitude and behaviour of the parent (Brown, 2009:5). It appears that parents, like teachers, are much more concerned about the more observable acts of aggression, like physical aggression. Fekkes *et al.* (2005:80) indicated that parents needed to become more aware of their children being involved in acts of aggression as this is the only way to successfully intervene and curb such situations from arising. Although the responsibility of communicating with parents regarding aggressive behaviour lies with the teachers, there is little chance of this happening if the teachers are unaware of relational aggression (Fekkes *et al.*, 2005:80). Yoon *et al.* (2004:307) state that certain family context characteristics may contribute to the development of relational aggression in children. Such characteristics include: parental conflict, coercion and psychological control. These characteristics have been found to be positively related to the development of relational aggression. Hartup (1972:290) conducted extensive research regarding aggression in children and found that children are likely to develop forms of aggressive behaviour when their home circumstances are unfavourable. If parents are generally aggressive in their parenting styles, it is likely that their children will mimic this type of behaviour. It is possible that, learners who view their parents as

capable to sort out conflict situations may easily resort to approaching an adult to sort out conflict (Hartup, 1972:292). From the modelling perspective, it is also possible that children who view instances of relational aggression at home, or in the involvement of a third party in a conflict situation, are more likely to copy that type of behaviour when in conflict (Baron & Byrne, 2000:442; Fiske, 2010:402; Hartup, 1972:293).

Mothers who are relationally aggressive may also teach this form of behaviour to their daughters without realising their impact on their children. Children's aggressive responses have been found to correspond more directly to the same-sex parent, which confirms that girls and boys may directly imitate the behaviour of their same-sex parent when confronted with conflict situations (Duman & Margolin, 2007:43). Duman and Margolin (2007:46) contend that specifically relationally aggressive responses are similar between mothers and daughters, but not between mothers and sons.

4.2.4 Category 4: Learners experience relational aggression in a group bound context

It was evident that relational aggression is often experienced in a group context and may serve specific functions. One of the foremost functions of relational aggression as indicated in this study is that relational aggression is used as a means of controlling peer groups. This category also provides evidence of the intense feelings learners experience when in a situation in which relational aggression is employed. There is further evidence that there is already a well-developed social hierarchy amongst primary school learners, and that learners are aware of the social hierarchies within peer groups. This category also discusses how learners experience group identity as more important than that of their own individual identity. Finally, the findings indicate that relational aggression is employed in direct and indirect ways. The discussion of these sub-categories follows.

4.2.4.1 Relational aggression is used as a means of controlling peer groups.

"... want (naam) ... sê hulle (die ander leerders in die groep) mag nie met ander kinders praat nie." (because [name] ... says they [the other learners in the group] may not talk to other learners) (Participant 14: White male).

"I get angry when they [the peer group] don't share their talk with me..." (Participant 23: Black female).

"... sy (hoof aggressor in die groep) kry dit altyd reg om die baas te wees ..." (She [the main aggressor in the group] always succeeds in being the boss) (Participant 15: White female).

"Daar is meisies wat gewild is omdat hulle met ander lelik is." (There are girls who are popular because they are nasty to others) (Participant 9: White female).

"... sy ('n meisie van 'n spesifieke groep) is te popular om met my te praat..." (she [a girl from a specific group] is too popular to talk to me) (Participant 9: White female).

"... toe wil sy (een van die maatjies in die groep) alleen met my praat ..." (then she [one of the friends in the group] wanted to speak to me alone) (Participant 2: White female).

"... maar daar is kinders met wie ons (die deelnemer se vriende) nie speel nie want ons (groep vriende) hou nie van hulle nie ..." (but there are children with whom we [the participant's friends] don't play anymore because we [group of friends] don't like them) (Participant 4: White male).

"... sy (die ontvanger van aggressie) is seker bang vir my" (she [the victim of aggression] is probably scared of me) (Participant 5: White female).

"... toe sê ek vir hom (leerder) ... hy mag dit (skinder of praat van my) nie weer doen nie ..." (then I said to him [learner] ... he may not do that (gossip or talk about me) again) (Participant 6: White male).

"Mostly I fight with my friends because they don't want me to play with other children...they want me to stay with them ... we must share our secrets." (Participant 24: Black female).

It seems that participants were very aware that certain acts of relational aggression can be used to ensure control of a social group. There is clear indication that some of the groups have a 'leader' and this learner can dictate to the others what to do and what not to do and whom to interact with and whom to avoid. Fear also plays a role in the control of the group. Participants do not seem to challenge those in charge but accept their authority. If there is conflict with someone outside the group, the entire

group behaves in a hostile fashion. This indicates the control the leader has over the group.

During middle childhood, the need for peer approval increase dramatically and friendship becomes extremely important to a learner; and peer relationships involve more personal intimacy than ever before (Yoon *et al.*, 2004:309). Learners who require social acceptance may engage in acts of relational aggression to ensure that they 'fit in' or become accepted into a group (Yoon *et al.*, 2004:305). Ludwig (2007:33) explains that girls are connected in a more intimate manner than boys, as they are more likely to divulge secrets and share feelings with each other. This kind of sharing provides an aggressor with powerful weapons, especially if an aggressor chooses to humiliate a victim to increase his or her social status or to punish a victim for a perceived wrong (Ludwig, 2007:33).

Of greater concern, however, is that relational aggression is most often used within the group of friends (as revealed in the comments that are provided above). Merritt-Gray (2007:2) explains that children redirect their relational aggression to peers within their groups in order to maintain their power over the group and to ensure popularity with outsiders. The fear of being alone or being socially excluded far outweighs the need to act against relationally aggressive peers which allows the behaviour of relationally aggressive peers to continue unhindered (Wilkinson, 2008:2). Such acts of relational aggression allow the aggressor to remain in control and show dominance over the rest of the group (Hendry, 2012:4). It also allows the aggressor power over other learners who are aware of what is happening within such a group, even when they are not the group or not.

4.2.4.2 Victims of peer groups' relationally aggressive behaviours experience intense emotions.

"... toe (na 'n insident van verhoudingsaggressie) is ek ook baie hartseer ..." (then [after an incident of relational aggression] I was also very heart sore) (Participant 6: White male).

"Ek kan nie slaap nie want ek voel sleg oor dit (bakeiery by die skool) ..." (I cannot sleep because I feel bad about it [fighting at school]) (Participant 1: White male).

"... ek voel hartseer en seer ... (wanneer verhoudings aggressie ervaar word)" (I feel sad and hurt [when acts of relational aggression have been experienced]) (Participant 3: White male).

"... dit maak my kwaad as hulle (die aggressors) dit (verhoudings aggressie gebruik) doen ..." (it makes me angry when they [the aggressors] do that [use relational aggression]) (Participant 4: White male).

"Ek is kwaad want hulle (die aggressors) maak my seer..." (I am angry because they [the aggressors] hurt me) (Participant 9: White female).

"Ek voel hartseer en dit maak my baie kwaad baie kwaad ..." (I feel sick at heart and it makes me very angry... very angry...) (Participant 9: White female).

"Hulle (leerders) kan jou lyf en jou hart seer maak ..." (They [learners] can hurt your body and your heart) (Participant 9: White female).

"I feel sad in my heart when that [being the victim of relationally aggressive acts] happens." (Participant 23: Black female).

It is clear that participants who are relationally aggressive also experience acts of relational aggression that are very intense and affect them deeply. They feel saddened or angry and appear to be experiencing associated emotional damage or stress.

The effects of relational aggression are significant as it causes victims to become withdrawn, suffer from anxiety, and fearful of attending school, which leads to continual absenteeism (De Vincentis, 2010:4). It also contributes to children becoming hostile toward peers, whether the behaviour of others was intentional or not (Paris, 2006:17). Ripley and O'Neil (2009:17) describe the effects of relational aggression on the victims as intense emotional stress which may lead to loneliness, anxiety, depression and the development of low self-esteem. It can also lead to the decrease in academic performance as negative or distressing emotions would impair a learner's ability to concentrate on school work. It is also clear that victims do not disclose the reason for their emotional distress easily because they often feel that no one will believe them because they cannot prove that they are being victimized by relationally aggressive learners. It is clear that relational aggression has a deleterious effect on the emotional development of victims, especially if it occurs when they are especially vulnerable (Dixon-Rayle *et al.*, 2007:34). They may suffer adjustment difficulties and are more likely to later on engage in delinquent behaviour, after an extended period of victimization. Another negative aspect is that relational aggression affects the quality of friendships amongst learners (Hendry, 2012:6).

Victims of relational aggression become distrustful of their peers and struggle to form new friendships. Their current friendships become characterized by conflict. This leads to further stress and has an impact on their emotional well-being (Hendry, 2012:6). Reynolds and Repetti (2010:284) contend that the impact of relational aggression causes overwhelmingly negative emotions at the time of the incident, and that the memory of the incident may be powerful enough to evoke the same emotions when remembered or recalled later. Significantly, aggressors are affected too. They may be rejected by their peers or face problems later in life as a result of social maladjustment (Merritt-Gray, 2007:3).

4.2.4.3 Learners are aware of the hierarchies within peer groups.

“Mens mag ook nie met haar (die aggressors) maatjies praat nie ...” (You may also not speak to her [the aggressor’s] friends) (Participant 19: White male).

“... Ja ... sy is die baas in graad ses ...” (... Yes ... she is the boss in grade six) (Participant 8: White female).

“... hulle (die mees gewilde groep leerders in die graad) maak al hoe meer maatjies want niemand gaan met hulle moeilikheid soek nie ...” (they [the most popular group of learners in the grade] make more friends because no one will look for trouble by them) (Participant 9: White female).

It seems as though the participants are aware that there is a social hierarchy within their grades. Many of the participants noted that there are groups and cliques in which one learner appears to be the most relationally aggressive. This is likely to mean that he or she becomes the dominant member of the group and automatically the learner who is in charge of the group. The other learners in such a group do what is expected of them by this learner. It also emerged that other learners were not free simply to approach a group like that. It seems that learners are almost ‘owned’ by the leader of the group or even members of the group. Furthermore, it is clear that other learners are in awe of these groups and so they would not even think of challenging them. It also became apparent that these groups have a number of learners who are submissive because they fear being rejected by the group. Challenging authority could lead to an attack from the entire group, not a socially desirable situation for any learner.

Paris (2006:7) found that girls who are relationally aggressive make use of peer relationships in a manipulative way to ensure that they remain on top of the social hierarchy. The very nature of relational aggression, according to Paris (2006:8) is found in the desire to make use of peer relationships to gain popularity and to exert control over peers. Cillessen and Mayeux (2004:160) found that there is a direct link between increased levels of relational aggression and popularity amongst classmates during middle childhood; however, these children are less liked by their classmates. Wilkinson (2008:2) believes that girls who are relationally aggressive are perceived as popular by their classmates because their classmates know that these children are in power and hold to the cards to the friendships in their groups. Markham (2010:18) conducted a study which found that aggressors making use of relational aggression are aware of their power and know that they possess characteristics that are feared by their classmates. Aggressors have furthermore stated that this form of aggression is not to be taken lightly and cannot be ignored by the victims thereof.

4.2.4.4 Learners experience group identity as more important than their own individual identity.

"... almal (in die groep) is kwaad vir haar ('n buitestaander wat nie deel is van die 'in-groep nie) nou praat hulle nie met haar nie ..." (everyone [in the group] is upset with her (an outsider who is not part of the ingroup) now they do not talk to her anymore) (Participant 5: White female).

"Sy (die meisie met wie die spreker baklei het) sê die ander kinders moet ook met my (deelnemer) fight." (She [the girl with whom the participant had a fight with] says the other children must also fight with me [the participant]) (Participant 8: White female).

"Hulle (die dominante lede van die groep) leer die ander in die groepie om ook so te wees ... almal doen presies wat hulle wil hê ..." (They [the dominant members of the group] teach the others in the group to be just like that ... everyone does exactly what they want them to) (Participant 9: White female).

"We are strong because we are a group...and we have given our group a name..." (Participant 24: Black female).

"Ja...mostly in the group we must all do the same thing..." (Participant 24: Black female).

The group context plays a significant role in the facilitation of relational aggression. It seems that participants are not able to separate themselves from the group and will act in any manner necessary to remain a part of the group. Their need to belong and to be in close friendship relationships becomes evident in their approach to learners who are not part of their group. Learners will act in a hostile manner towards another learner, not because they have problem with him or her but because of the leader of the group's feelings about this individual. It seems that when one group member is angry with another learner, the rest of the group will automatically be hostile towards that learner, even when they have no reason to be.

Girls, in particular, have a deep need for peer acceptance and connectedness during middle childhood and early adolescence (Paris, 2006:14). This creates the ideal breeding ground for relational aggression to develop, as it seems that children would rather endure acts of relational aggression than be left out of a group. This desire to be accepted may be misused by socially dominant peers as leverage to control a group of peers and their relationships with each other (Paris, 2006:14). Groups and cliques have been found to be intimidating and powerful, as perceived by their peers (Markham, 2010:18). These groups may be known as relationally aggressive, with all the learners in the group participating in such acts, motivated by their need to belong (Dixon-Rayle *et al.*, 2007:33). Girls, who are well known for employing relationally aggressive behaviours, are viewed as so powerful and strong that they hold sway over the others, often without having to directly ask for such 'obedience' (Hendry, 2012:7). Hendry (2012:13) states that groups of learners who engaged in acts of relational aggression toward a third party reported feelings of a strengthened friendship amongst themselves even if it was just for a short period of time, which may explain why the group context of relational aggression in this study was found emergent.

4.2.4.5 Relational aggression is employed in direct and indirect ways.

"... toe sê sy, kom almal stop nou (die speletjie wat die groep speel) en ummm ... toe wil sy alleen met my praat ..." (Then she said, let us all stop now [the game the group was playing] and ummm ... then she wanted to speak to me alone) (Participant 2: White female).

"Toe ek vandag by die skool aankom toe hardloop hulle (die deelnemer se vriende) net vir my weg en sê hulle is nie meer maats met my nie ..." (When I got to school

today, they [the participant's friends] ran away from me and told me that they are not my friends anymore) (Participant 3: White male).

"Hulle (vriende) hardloop vir my weg en kyk my skeef aan en sê goed vir my ..." (They [friends] run away from me and look at me strangely and say things to me) (Participant 3: White male).

"Mens kan seker vra dat sy (die aggressor) ophou of mens kan iets lelik sê wat haar sal seer maak ..." (one could probably ask her [the aggressor] to stop or one could say something mean that would hurt her) (Participant 5: White female).

"Hulle (leerders) hou daarvan om liegstories te versprei ..." (They [learners] enjoy spreading lies) (Participant 4: White male).

"... daar is baie kinders wat liegstories en skinderstories versprei ... en dan is almal lelik met hulle ..." (there are many children who spread rumours and gossip ... then everyone is mean to them) (Participant 5: White female).

"Ek het vir juffrou gesê ek het nie 'n maatjie nie wat al die kinders is mislik met my." (I told the teacher that I do not have a friend because everyone is miserable with me) (Participant 1: White male).

"... die ander meisies (in die groep) maak toe 'n lys, 'n stemlys om te sien wie hou van my en my beste maatjie ... en toe stem die kinders (die ander kinders in die klas) en toe word ons ingeroep want juffrou vind toe uit van die lys en toe kom dit uit dat ons die lys gemaak het." (the other girls [in our group] then made a list; a voter's role to see who like me and my best friend ... and then the children voted and we were called in because teacher found out about the list and then it came out that we made the list) (Participant 5: White female).

"Hulle ('n groep graad ses leerders) dink hulle kan vir almal sê wat hulle moet doen ... hulle versprei graag stories van ander. Hulle speel daar agter die blou muurtjie en toe val een van hulle en toe gaan hulle kantoor toe saam met haar en toe sê een van hulle sy het wit goed op haar hare gesien en toe vertel hulle vir almal sy het luise en dis hoekom sy in die siekekamer is ..." (They [a group of grade 6 learners] think they can tell everyone what to do ... they like to spread stories about others. They played there behind the blue wall and then one of them fell and they went to the office with her and then one of them said they saw white things in her hair and then they told

everyone that she had lice and that is why she is in the sickroom) (Participant 5: White female).

“Ek dink ... (naam) speel net saam met hulle want almal in die graad hou van ... (naam) maar sy is gemeen en sy kan lekker skinder so sy is seker oulik maar mens moet versigtig wees vir haar ... voor haar ma is sy baie oulik maar ek is bang vir haar ...” (I think ... [name] is just playing with them because everyone in the grade likes ... [name] but she is mean and she can gossip a lot so she is probably nice but one must be careful of her ... in front her mom she is very nice but I am scared of her) (Participant 5: White female).

“When I go to the toilet then they [the other peers in the group] talk about me...sometimes I will ask my friend what they said...” (Participant 23: Black female).

The above statements of the participants indicate that relational aggression is employed in both direct and indirect ways. Learners who are relationally aggressive are aware of the effectiveness of employing relational aggression and seem to have both employed and experienced it, in some form or the other. The participants state that social exclusion is the form of relational aggression most often experienced and may be direct or indirect in nature. Participants also describe situations where they have been directly excluded from friendship or peer groups, most often not being aware of the reason for their exclusion. Participants also describe instances of being publicly humiliated and being directly ignored by their peers or receiving threatening looks from former friends. The participants frequently spoke of groups of learners who easily spread rumours, sometimes ruthlessly malicious in nature. Insults and gossip were also cited as methods of getting back at someone who has disobeyed the group rules. There is also indication of covert ways of employing relational aggression amongst peers. One participant told me how she and her friend instructed another girl to draw up a list which was circulated in their class and served as a way for them to identify who does not like them, as indicated by the following quotation: *“Die ander meisies maak toe ‘n lys, ‘n stemlys om te sien wie hou van my en my beste maatjie ... en toe stem die groep ...”* (The other girls made a list, a voting list to see who likes me and my best friend ... and then the group voted).

Literature indicates that relational aggression can be employed in either a direct or indirect manner. Reynolds and Repetti (2010:284) explain that relational aggression was found to be most often used as a means to get back at someone for a perceived

wrong to the aggressor. Other reasons reported for making use of relational aggression included: boredom alleviation, attention seeking, jealousy, and the desire to indicate that one could be part of a group as typically aggressive behaviours are exhibited by someone (group inclusion), (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:284). Crothers *et al.* (2005:349) state that examples of relational aggression are gossiping, social exclusion, isolation and alienation from a group of peers, writing notes or stealing another person's friends away from them. Their research indicated that the aim of making use of relational aggression was not only to retaliate or take revenge, but also to ensure that the victim feels hurt on an emotional level (Crothers *et al.*, 2005:350). Geiger *et al.* (2003:27), Yoon *et al.*, (2004:304), Casas, Weigel, Crick, Ostrov, Woods, Yeh and Huddleston-Casas (2006:209) describe several forms of relational aggression which could be either direct or indirect. The distinction here being that in direct relational aggression the aggressor remains anonymous and when the act is direct, the aggressor is known to the victim and the behaviour is often observed by other peers.

4.3 THEME TWO: LEARNERS ARTICULATE MEASURES TO MANAGE RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

The second theme in this study relates to the participants' articulation of ways to manage relational aggression. Two categories were identified: firstly, learners suggest ways of dealing with relational aggression and secondly, learners perceive their religious and personal values as issues which influences the way in which relational aggression is managed. The section below provides each of the two categories with related sub-categories followed by relevant literature that confirm the findings.

4.3.1 Category 1: Learners suggest ways of how to deal with relational aggression.

In this category, I identify and discuss the ways learners suggest of how to deal with relational aggression. In the first sub-category, learners suggest that aggressors should be approached and confronted as a way to deal with instances of relational aggression. The second sub-category indicates that learners suggest personal relaxation, reflective thinking and ignoring the aggressor as ways in which to deal with relational aggression. The third sub-category suggests that learners feel that a person of authority should be informed about instances or situations where relational

aggression is experienced. Each sub-category is discussed and relevant literature is cited to substantiate the findings.

4.3.1.1 Learners suggest that aggressors should be approached and confronted.

"I will tell him (the aggressor) he must go out." (Participant 21: Black male).

"He (the aggressor) must say to me sorry." (Participant 21: Black male).

"... ons (groep) moet bietjie met haar (die meisie wat verkeerd gedoen het volgens die groep) praat ..." (we [group] must talk to her ... [the girl that did something wrong according to the group]) (Participant 2: White female).

"... ek sal vir hom (die aggressor) sê hy moet ophou (baklei) ..." (I will tell him [the aggressor] that he must stop [fighting]) (Participant 4: White male).

"... ek sal vir haar (die aggressor) sê sy moet ophou of ons gaan pouse baklei ..." (I will tell her [the aggressor] she must stop or we will fight during break) (Participant 9: White female).

It is evident that some participants feel that they can approach an aggressor directly in a way that will end the conflict. However, this direct confrontation may also lead to sustained conflict, which in turn may lead to instances of physical aggression or other forms of conflict. Some participants suggest that the aggressor may not be aware of his/her wrong-doing and therefore the aggressor should be approached with a command, although the confrontation in itself may be interpreted as an aggressive move and so the aggressor is likely to retaliate, especially if the situation is already aggressive. One participant suggested that if the aggressor did not apologise to him when told to do so, there would be further conflict. In this particular case, however, the victim felt that an apology, whether sincere or not, would be good enough to end the conflict and fix the wrong-doing.

According to Waasdorp and Bradshaw (2009:738), the way of coping with relational aggression that victims reported most often was to avoid situations with relationally aggressive peers. Learners who chose to engage actively in a situation where relational aggression was being employed may be seen as using a form of active coping, namely confronting the aggressor directly (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009:738). Finally, learners indicated that as a last option, they would engage in aggressive behaviours themselves in order to retaliate or take revenge, while the

choice of their relationally aggressive behaviour was influenced by how they perceived the initial act of relational aggression towards them (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009:738).

Gomes (2011:3) also found that most learners felt that directly approaching the aggressor was the most straight forward way in which to manage a conflict situation, especially when dealing with relational aggression. This finding emerged during a study (Gomes, 2011:4) which investigated the different strategies learners make use of when coping with relational aggression. It seems that a learner who is able to confront the aggressor directly has a higher level of self-confidence or that the relationship between the aggressor and the victim is considered more personal than other relationships (Gomes, 2011:4). Victims who are willing to approach the aggressor state that they either do so in order to stop the continuation of relational aggression or that if they did not approach the aggressor it would bother them (Gomes, 2011:5).

4.3.1.2 Learners suggest personal relaxation, reflective thinking or ignoring the aggressor as ways to deal with relationally aggressive learners.

"... ek haal maar net diep asem ..." (I just take a deep breath) (Participant 5: White female).

"... ek het maar net my hande in my sak gesit en vir hom gelag ..." (I just put my hands in my pocket and laughed at him) (Participant 7: White male).

"... ek weet ek het 'n humeur probleem ..." (I know I have a temper problem) (Participant 7: White male).

It would appear that not only do the participants know who to approach in a conflict situation, but they also know how to calm themselves. However, as most of the participants are learners who are perceived by their peers as relationally aggressive, it is clear that these techniques are perhaps known, but not always followed. In some cases, the act of self-awareness seems to help the participants to realize their own aggressive behavioural problems and their contribution to the development of the conflict situation in which they find themselves.

Children make use of two types of coping strategies when dealing with relational aggression; namely, emotion-focused strategies and problem-focused strategies (Remillard & Lamb, 2005:223). Making use of self-reflection and self-awareness is

indicated as the use of problem-focused strategies. This becomes possible when children become actively aware of their own contribution to the situation and how to prevent similar situations from arising. However, one of the participants stated that he would just place his hands in his pockets and laugh at the aggressor. This may indicate a tendency to avoid a situation by internalising the threat of the aggressor. However, the aggressor could perceive this provocative so it could ultimately lead to continued aggression (Remillard & Lamb, 2005:224).

“... ons moenie terug lelik wees nie ...” (we must not be mean back) (Participant 5: White female).

“... ek sê baie maklik vir die ander kinders ‘n lelike ding ...” (I say something mean to other children very easily) (Participant 10: White female).

From the above quotations, it is apparent that learners are able to reflect on their relationally aggressive behaviour and are capable of self-awareness regarding such behaviours. The participants seem to understand that their behaviour is not appropriate, but at the same time do not yet know how to manage these situations. Some of the participants were able to identify their involvement in instances of relational aggression, stating, for example, that they were aware of the part they had played. They admitted to having an aggression or temper problem and to insulting the other person. Another participant who stated that she was aware of the social obligation not to retaliate was nevertheless identified as being the most relationally aggressive learner in her grade by her peers. This indicates that she does not follow her own advice. One participant stated that she had acted in a relationally aggressive manner but did not admit to its being a frequent problem.

Being aware of own wrong-doing (self-reflection) or of characteristics in oneself that could lead to aggressive situations is a positive indication of development (Kostelnik, 2010:1). During middle childhood children need to learn how to negotiate social situations and such understanding requires learning certain skills like accepting different perspectives, different opinions and showing respect for such differences (Louw & Louw, 2007:273). They also need to learn how to identify their own part in causing such situations (Kostelnik, 2010:1).

“... I just take my bag and go ...” (Participant 23: Black female).

“... I must just leave it (fighting) and go” (Participant 24: Black female).

“... ek sal hom (die aggressor) net los ...” (I will just leave him [the aggressor])
(Participant 14: White male).

“... ek sal hom (die aggressor) net ignoreer ... om iets te sê gaan dit (die probleem tussen die twee partye) net erger maak ...” (I will just ignore him [the aggressor] ... to say something will just make it [the problem between the two parties] worse)
(Participant 15: White female).

“... if she (a friend) makes me angry then I just walk away ...” (Participant 22: Black female).

“... no teacher ... I must leave it ...” (Participant 25: Black male).

“... I tell him he must go out ...” (Participant 21: Black male).

A number of participants suggested that to ignore the aggressor would be the most appropriate way of avoiding possible relational aggression. It seems that some participants are keen to avoid any form of confrontation and thus they would rather just walk away and not face the aggressor. One participant confirmed this by saying that to approach the aggressor would ultimately just make the whole situation worse *“... ek sal hom net ignoreer ... om iets te sê gaan dit net erger maak”*, (I will just ignore him ... to say something will only make it worse).

These responses indicate that several participants felt that to engage in acts of aggression or to retaliate would ultimately only make the conflict situation worse. It should be noted that ignoring a peer who has done wrong is a direct act of relational aggression, which results in the public humiliation of the ignored peer. It has been found to be one the main functions of relational aggression (Reynolds & Repetti, 2010:293). In addition, Reynolds and Repetti (2010:293) add that ignoring a peer may be the result of a conflict situation between two parties. This is seen not as a form of amusement or social control, but mainly a form of retaliation. Ignoring a peer directly is thus perceived as a form of relational aggression. Reynolds and Repetti (2010:294) found that victims reported the greatest number of negative emotions as arising from this kind of relational aggression. Ignoring or walking away from a peer who is behaving in a relationally aggressive manner may also be an active coping strategy in the form of non-confrontational behaviour. Such conflict skills may be used to ensure that the fighting does not escalate, or it may be an indication that the victim feels he or she cannot respond to the situation and therefore prefers to walk

away or ignore the aggressor, although the impact on the victim remains the same (Xie *et al.*, 2002:207).

Coyne *et al.* (2008a:585), however, argue that walking away or ignoring an aggressor is a negative coping response, and does not lead to a reduction or halting of acts of relational aggression. Nevertheless, walking away or ignoring an aggressor appears to be the most popular choice of coping in middle childhood, especially when children are faced with relational or overt forms of aggression (Coyne *et al.*, 2008a:587).

4.3.1.3 Learners suggest that a person of authority needs to be informed about relationally aggressive acts.

“... ek gaan net na die juffrou toe gaan...dan sal ek my ma gaan sê...” (I will just go to the teacher ... then she will just go tell my mom) (Participant 10: White female).

“... (when I get angry) I do only to tell the teachers” (Participant 21: Black male).

“... jy gaan net na die Mr toe of na die leiers toe (na ‘n situasie waarin verhoudings aggressie gebruik is) ...” (you just go to sir or to the leaders [after a situation in which relational aggression was used]) (Participant 14: White male).

“Ek vertel dadelik die juffrou.” (I tell the teacher immediately) (Participant 17: White female).

“Juffrou het gesê ons (groep) moet ophou met ons skinderstories” (Teacher said we [our group] must stop our gossip) (Participant 20: White female).

It seems that in the participants' experience the involvement of an authority figure is usually necessary to end the conflict or to provide guidance on how to resolve the conflict. Should the authority figure not respond in the appropriate manner, the learner may decide to turn to another authority figure to solve the problem. It would also seem that the participants are very sure of whom they can turn to and thus have no doubts about who could assist in conflict management. Participants almost exclusively nominated their teacher as the person they would turn to, even though the same peers felt that their teachers do not know which learners behave in a relationally aggressive manner and do not understand the phenomenon of relational aggression at all.

Waasdorp and Bradshaw (2009:739) found that children were almost always keen to involve a figure of authority when being relationally victimized. Girls were more likely to turn to a teacher whereas boys were more likely to turn to a parent (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009:739). However, as indicated earlier, teachers appeared to be rather unresponsive to acts of relational aggression when these are reported to them. This poses the question of why children are very likely to turn to a teacher if teachers do not respond to these acts. The same study (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009:743) found that children are unlikely to turn to their parents when faced with acts relational aggression at school in which they were victims, but the parents thought that their children would most likely to turn to them (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2009:743).

4.3.2 Category 2: Learners experience their religious and personal values as issues which influence the way in which relational aggression is managed.

Some of the participants indicated that their possible management strategies are influenced by their religious and personal values.

“... ek wil soos ‘n kind van die Here wees en wil nie baklei nie ...” (I want to be like a child of the Lord and do not want to fight) (Participant 1: White male).

“... moenie aan ander doen wat jy nie aan jouself gedoen wil het nie ...” (Do not do to others what you do not want done to you) (Participant 8: White female).

“... Love your friend like you love yourself ...” (Participant 22: Black male).

“... I tell them it is fine (if they gossip) ... one day God will answer my prayers ...” (Participant 24: Black female).

Participants mentioned a religious figure and quoted religious sayings when asked how they would retaliate, but do not yet know how to align their actions with their beliefs or values. They seem to understand the moral implications of their beliefs, for example, that they should not do wrong to another, but seem unable to explain why they do so regardless of their convictions. It is apparent that they feel they should not provoke a fight. However, should someone anger them, they are rather inclined to fight back, feeling that their retaliation is justified. One participant mentioned that she ignores negative behaviour; she trusts in the final judgment of God. Other participants refer to themselves as wanting to follow the example of their god and understand that aggressive behaviour is not a part of that example. However, their own peers indicate that they are relationally aggressive, which may point out that

although they understand the concepts of religion and the behavioural implications, they do not act in accordance with these.

Religion plays a role in a child's moral development (Bridges & Moore, 2002:2). Religious instruction and tendencies in the home may lead a child to experience feelings of guilt or remorse when they have been involved in wrong-doing, or when they have inflicted harm on another person (Bridges & Moore, 2002:3). The same literature suggests that religion or religious values may be used as a method of coping, from an early age on. However, during middle childhood, children undergo significant changes in cognition which may influence their understanding of these religious values, leading them to question, accept or discard some of these values, with obvious effects in their behaviour amongst their peers (Bridges & Moore, 2002:5).

"My pa het gesê ek moet my eie battles fight maar as ek die fight begin is die hel los" (My dad said that I must fight my own battles but if I start a fight, all hell will break lose) (Participant 3: White male).

"Ek is veronderstel om die beter persoon te wees" (I am supposed to be the better person) (Participant 9: White female).

It seems as though the participants are aware of an understanding that they are expected to act in a socially acceptable way but do not yet understand how to do so consistently, especially when they are angry or feel wronged. There is some indication that participants are aware of the consequences of aggressive behaviour. The consequences are not always considered before the acts are committed. These learners do not seem to be deterred from acting negatively in response to provocation. Some participants seem to be aware of their wrong-doing as they stated "... veronderstel ..." (supposed to) and "... miskien ..." (maybe), thus indicative of their understanding that they are not meant to react in such a manner but choose to do so anyway.

Murray-Close and Crick (2006:362) explain that children's moral attributions toward relational aggression during middle childhood prevent them from always being able to differentiate between levels of emotional hurtfulness. Participants in their study indicated that physical aggression is more harmful than relational aggression because the injuries are clearly visible (Murray-Close & Crick, 2006:492). During the typical ages found in middle-childhood, children were less concerned with societal

rules and norms and more concerned with personal harm that could be done to them in a conflict situation. This suggests that during middle childhood children do not yet consider the impact of their actions, although they are aware of it (Murray-Close & Crick, 2006:490). Even though children are aware of the societal rules, they seem to decide on an aggression strategy on personal grounds related to their own gain or loss as a determining factor. It seems too that there are gender differences in moral judgments related to aggression: girls are more likely to judge relational aggression as wrong (Murray-Close *et al.*, 2006:362; Nelson *et al.*, 2008:639).

Eisenberg, Reykowski and Staub (1989:376) discuss Eisenberg's model of Moral Development. This discussion provides a framework for the finding that children in middle childhood are not yet able to understand certain abstract qualities regarding their use of moral judgments and thoughts. Knowing that one has a problem controlling one's temper and attempting to curb outbursts indicates that the child is reasoning on the second level, 'needs-oriented reasoning'. Such reasoning is mostly concerned with children weighing up what they know society expects from them and their stereotyped ideas of good and bad. They may understand that aggression is not an acceptable form of social behaviour, but may not necessarily always act on this knowledge; at this stage of thought and reasoning is in its beginning stages and the child may still be able to simply ignore such thoughts, or not yet have such thoughts at all (Eisenberg *et al.*, 1989:376).

Louw and Louw (2007:269) apply Jean Piaget's theory of moral development to middle childhood. Children are in the stage of moral relativism from the age of ten years. A characteristic of this stage is that learners are able to bend societal rules and appear to understand that rules are no longer absolute. Learners furthermore possess the ability to understand that punishment of wrong-doing depends on getting caught in the act (Louw & Louw, 2007:269). Views on wrong and right behaviours are evaluated from different perspectives, and are significantly influenced by the interactions children have in their peer groups. As relational aggression is often experienced in a peer group context, a learner may develop a questionable set of values relating to its use. They become aware of the possibility that they may never be punished for such covert forms of behaviour as long as they remain anonymous when committing these acts (Louw & Louw, 2007:269).

4.4 DISCUSSION OF FIELD NOTES

4.4.1 Observational notes

During the research process I made several observations which were relevant to the study, specifically relating to the context in which the learners find themselves. Such observations provided understanding and insight into some of the statements the learners made and allowed me to understand and interpret their perceptions and experiences of relational aggression within their own school context.

During the peer nomination process, each negative question was met with nods and immediate responses from the learners, whereas the positive questions seemed to take longer for the learners to respond to. Learners consistently attributed most of the negative qualities or characteristics of relationally aggressive learners to one or two of their peers, indicating that their relationally aggressive behaviours were well known to their peers.

At the metropolitan primary school, the majority of the participants were neatly dressed and friendly. Not one of them appeared to be aggressive in nature, although their peers nominated them as relationally aggressive. During the interviews, a number of the participants were able to recall incidents of relational aggression in great detail. It was interesting to observe that several learners shared very confidential and painful memories with someone who was not known to them.

The younger learners, typically in grade four, seemed to enjoy the interview and preferred to talk about how others were mean to them, but seemed initially reluctant to engage in discussion. One of these younger participants described her own nasty behaviours to the researcher, but did so making use of a third person, and appeared judgmental of this 'person's' behaviour toward her friends and classmates. A number of participants seemed reluctant and hesitant at first to share their own acts of relational aggression. These participants preferred to engage in conversation about their closest friends and their acts of relationally aggressive behaviours. When the participants saw that I did not judge their friends' behaviours, they began to discuss how they, too, had committed similar acts of relational aggression. The older learners, however, specifically the girls, were very comfortable when discussing their own acts of relational aggression and did not appear ashamed when recalling them. In fact, they laughed when recalling some of the conflict situations in which relational aggression was used. These learners came across as confident and seemed to lack remorse for their actions. Their detailed descriptions of their own relationally

aggressive behaviours, as well as those of their peers, provided me with rich descriptions of the type of acts that were being committed and why learners would choose to make use of such behaviours. There was an increase in the prevalence of relational aggression being used amongst girls. On the other hand, the boys who took part in this research were more likely to share their engagement in physical acts of aggression when they felt they had been provoked enough.

In the context of the rural primary school, it seemed as though the opposite scenario was true. Learners were mostly older than the typical age for their grade. The primary school did not have many of the basic necessities such as running toilets or taps for water. The learners at the rural primary school were friendly and welcoming and I felt comfortable. Interestingly, the learners at the rural primary school shared more ideas regarding the management of relational aggression, should it occur, and provided concrete ideas. Most indicated that they would simply tell the teacher, and that, if there was really no change in the aggressor's behaviour, physical forms of aggression would be an adequate way to deal with the behaviour.

4.4.2 Theoretical notes

In order to gain understanding into the behaviour of the learners who participated in the study, I had to investigate several theories regarding the use of aggression and more importantly, relational aggression. The observational notes helped me to extract meaning with regards to the context of relational aggression in the primary school setting. Learners were experiencing relational aggression on a daily basis, and would often observe acts of relational aggression being employed amongst peers. The development of guidelines, an aim of this research, was of the utmost importance to me. I wanted to provide learners who were experiencing relational aggression, in whichever capacity, with guidelines and skills that could help them manage instances of relational aggression.

Writing down the theoretical notes was methodologically important to me in order to bracket my bias as a teacher and also keep focus on the main research question of this study.

4.4.3 Methodological notes

Choosing a qualitative design for this study allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of primary school learners with

regard to relational aggression. The qualitative design allowed for me to use a smaller sample but still gain rich data on primary school learners' perceptions and experiences of relational aggression at school as a result of their lived experiences. I constantly referred back to the research question and the aims of the study to ensure that the data collected would answer the research question and achieve the aims of my study. During the semi-structured phenomenological interviews, I engaged in more conversation with the learners than would normally be expected, and made use of simpler words to ask questions and probe. The participants were still young and did not engage readily in conversation with a stranger. It was crucial for the learners to understand that the interview was confidential and that they would not get into trouble about any statements made to the researcher. The longer the duration of the interview, the more the participants engaged in conversation and seemed to feel more comfortable. The interviews were successful and provided me with rich and descriptive data pertaining to the perceptions and experiences of relational aggression as it is lived by primary school learners in the intermediate phase of education, which was validated by the independent coders during the data analysis process.

4.4.4 Personal and reflective notes

In the process of data collection, I made several notes about the different environments of the primary schools and the emotions I experienced. There were significant differences between the metropolitan and rural primary schools, which allowed me to experience a sense of the differences between the two groups of participating learners. There was a willingness of learners from both schools to participate and the learners from both schools made me feel welcome. I also noted the immediate environment of the two schools. The metropolitan school had limited access for outsiders and the playgrounds were adequately kept and fenced. There were also sport facilities.

4.5 SUMMARY

This chapter explored the findings of this study on the perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools. Verbatim quotations were used to illustrate the themes, categories and subcategories that emerged when the data was coded. Literature was used to substantiate the findings from the data.

Findings from this study indicate that learners experience relational aggression in different ways. Learners' experience of relational aggression is influenced by their social contexts. It appears that learners associate acts of relational aggression with a lack of supervision by teachers. Learners make use of relational aggression as a tool to manipulate peer relationships in a direct and indirect manner and furthermore associate their experiences of relational aggression with learners who seem popular with or well-known to other learners. Learners also indicated that they have experienced relational aggression as a means of justifiable retaliation. There was also evidence that learners' negative responses to aggressors encourage further acts of relational aggression. The second category suggests that learners are aware that the presence of a teacher constrains relationally aggressive learners. Learners perceive teachers as being unaware of relationally aggressive learners and having misconceptions about relationally aggressive learners. Learners who are perceived as relationally aggressive by their peers are able to maintain a reputation for being well-behaved. In the findings in category three, learners describe parents who are employed at school as a contributing factor to their children's relationally aggressive behaviour. Learners indicated that they experienced their peers' involving their parents in conflict situations at school. This constitutes a form of protection. The fourth category suggests that learners experience relational aggression in a group-bound context. Relational aggression is used as a means of controlling peer groups. Victims of peer groups' relationally aggressive behaviours experience intense emotions. Learners also indicate that they are aware of the social hierarchies within peer groups and learners experience group identity as more important than their own individual identity. Finally, the data revealed that relational aggression is employed in direct and indirect ways.

In the second theme, learners articulate ways of managing relational aggression. Learners suggest various ways of dealing with relational aggression. The most common suggestion is that aggressors should be confronted. Learners also suggest personal relaxation, reflective thinking, ignoring the aggressor or informing a person of authority about the relationally aggressive acts that have been committed. The second category indicates that learners see their religious and personal values as influencing the way in which relational aggression is managed.

The following chapter provides a discussion of this study. This includes a summary of the study, as well as the limitations of this study and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, GUIDELINES, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I discuss the findings within the theoretical framework. I then offer guidelines for the management of relational aggression by learners who are involved in instances of relational aggression. Next I propose a set of useful skills for intermediate phase learners experiencing relational aggression. The next section of this chapter discusses the recommendations of this study. Finally there is a brief discussion of the limitations of the study as well as the conclusions that may be drawn.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

I consulted several theories regarding the use of aggression, the development of aggressive behaviour and theories that were specifically related to the phenomenon of relational aggression. The Social Learning Theory and the Social Information Processing Theory which provided the framework for the study (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007:30) are discussed next.

5.2 DISCUSSION

As indicated in Chapter Two, there are several theories, models and perspectives that could have been used in this study. However, the findings were best located in the Social Learning Theory and the Social Information Processing Theory. Each of these is related to the findings in the sections below.

5.2.1 Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory provides an explanation for the development of relational aggression as experienced by learners in the Intermediate phase (Field *et al.*, 2009:18). The Social Learning Theory is considered one of the most accurate theories regarding aggression research (Kassin, Fein & Markus, 2011:451). As relational aggression is a form of indirect aggression, the Social Learning Theory may be applied to relational aggression in an attempt to locate the phenomenon within a theoretical framework. The Social Learning Theory is based on three

assumptions (Hart & Kritsonis, 2006:3). Each assumption is discussed and applied in terms of the findings in this study.

Firstly, the Social Learning Theory states that aggression is a *learned behaviour* and acquired through observation (Fiske, 2010:357; Hart & Kritsonis, 2006:3). Children learn how to behave in social situations by observing the behaviour of models in their environment. During middle childhood, the age group on which this study focused, the peer group is one of the foremost social environments in which learners function in. Learners who participated in this study indicated that they are aware of relational aggression and experience it in an ongoing basis in their peer groups. Learners specifically stated that relational aggression can be employed in peer groups and may be used to allow the aggressor to maintain control of the group or to manipulate peer groups. It seems therefore that relational aggression may be learned by peers.

The second assumption of the Social Learning Theory is that social behaviour, such as relational aggression, is learned by means of symbolic modelling (Kassin *et al.*, 2011:450). Such models may be portrayed in the media, including the ideas, values and behaviours of such models (Hart & Kritsonis, 2006:3). Learners in this study expressed their perception of learners who are relationally aggressive as popular, both with the teachers and their peer groups. According to Kassin *et al.* (2011:451), Field *et al.* (2009:18) and Papalia, Olds and Feldman, (2009:264), girls and boys are expected to behave in a gender appropriate manner. Girls are not generally expected to engage in physical forms of aggression: as such forms of aggression are mostly associated with boys. Girls are more likely to engage in gentle, soft and feminine behaviour, with such ideas are portrayed by the media overwhelmingly (Fiske, 2010; Field *et al.*, 2009:18). Young girls are taught from early ages which behaviours are appropriate and which are not, and relational aggression may be transferred to young girls by their idols being portrayed by the media as beautiful, popular and feminine. The idea of engaging in behaviour that is controversial, like physical forms of aggression, would not appeal to girls especially, and would destroy their reputation for being well behaved in the eyes of their teachers (Randall, 2001:39). Keeping up appearances and maintaining their image is an ongoing task, which some of the learners participating in this study managed to do well as was indicated during the participants' interviews. In order to ensure that their reputations remain untarnished in the eyes of their teachers and parents, they may choose to use relational aggression as it is not as easily observable and it is harder to detect by authorities, such as teachers and parents.

The third assumption is that the *element of reward* serves as reinforcement for social behaviours (Fiske, 2010:357; Hart & Kritsonis, 2006:3). This assumption may explain the learners' perception that relational aggression is not easily observed by teachers, so teachers are generally unaware of such events taking place, even more so, by whom these acts are committed. By ensuring that acts of relational aggression are committed when there is a lack of teacher supervision, relationally aggressive learners maintain their reputations which serve to reinforce their behaviour as there are no consequences for their behaviour. Learners also indicated that they would involve their parents in conflict situations in which relational aggression had been used. This finding may be substantiated by placing it within the assumption of *element of reward*. If conflict situations could be solved by an outsider who appeared powerful and strong, learners could view involving such an outsider, like a parent, as a form of reinforcement for their acts. Furthermore, learners expressed their fear of confronting learners who had family members that were employed by the school; they were aware of the protection that the parental involvement offered those learners. Again, such protection could serve to reinforce relationally aggressive behaviours as there was little or no punishment for committing relationally aggressive acts.

Another important aspect of the Social Learning Theory is that the theory takes several factors into account when determining if a certain social behaviour is learnt. Firstly, the observer needs to identify with the model (Duman & Margolin, 2007:42). The higher the level of identification, the more successfully the behaviour will be learnt by the observer. In this study it is clear that learners are determined to be well liked by their peers, but they perceive learners who are popular and well-liked as relationally aggressive. Media portrays relational aggression as a 'safe' way to retaliate, and such behaviours are portrayed by characters with which learners can easily identify (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008:1553). The second factor is related to the consequences emanating from such behaviour (Duman & Margolin, 2007:42). Findings in this study indicate that teachers have misconceptions about learners who are perceived as relationally aggressive by their peers. It seems that in some cases they do not believe reports of relational aggression regarding such learners. Learners also tend to make use of indirect forms of relational aggression, such as gossip and rumour mongering, to manipulate peer relationships. The observer of such behaviours would soon learn by observation that if acts of relational aggression are committed when teachers are not present, by someone with a reputation for good behaviour, then the chances of being punished are small. Learners would also

observe that acts of relational aggression are a successful tool to use when the goal of the aggressor is to maintain a form of control of a peer group. Furthermore, they can be committed without reproach or punishment. The final factor which is taken into consideration in the Social Learning Theory is that a learner evaluates how effective such behaviour is and how acceptable such behaviour is (Duman & Margolin, 2007:42). Learners indicated that relational aggression was highly effective in maintaining control of friendships, that it could be committed in both direct and indirect ways effectively, and was prevalent more amongst girls. According to the learners who participated, it seemed as though relational aggression that was used a tool to control friendships was more acceptable than physical forms of fighting, as it could not be observed or punished as easily.

5.2.2 The Social Information Processing Theory

The Social Information Processing Theory has been used to provide an explanation for the specific cognitive steps that are involved when children find themselves in conflict situations and is related to the process of social reasoning within children (Martin, 2010:9; Murray-Close *et al.*, 2006:346). It has been extensively used in international research relating to relational aggression and is useful in helping researchers identify heuristic factors which lead to or contribute to the use of relational aggression (Martin, 2010:9).

In this study, the Social Information Processing Theory can be used to provide a framework for understanding the group bound context of relational aggression and the learners' choice of coping mechanisms, specifically when it is more retaliatory in nature.

The findings show that learners experienced several forms of relational aggression. Learners who are perceived as relationally aggressive, are often victims of relational aggression within their peer groups themselves. They reported experiencing intense emotional distress during and after an incident in which relationally aggressive behaviours were employed against the victim. An assumption of the Social Information Processing Theory is that emotional distress is an important factor in a child's interpretation of another child's intention in a social situation (Crick *et al.*, 2002:1134). Relationally aggressive children make use of hostile attributions which leads to their choice of relationally aggressive behaviours (Crick *et al.*, 2002:1135). In this study, the participants recalled incidents in which they committed acts of

relational aggression but could also recall incidents of being the victim of relational aggression which led to intense emotional distress.

The Social Information Processing Theory is based on six steps which are interrelated (Martin, 2010:9). Firstly, learners take cues from their social environment. Learners may feel that a situation is hostile, or interpret the group's behaviour as hostile toward them. In the second step, when the learners interpret the cues of the particular situation, their emotional state is crucial and becomes relevant in their cognition (Crick *et al*, 2002:1135). If learners are emotionally distressed, as several participants stated, or recall similar past experiences in which emotional distress was experienced, they would interpret the situation as hostile (Crick & Werner, 1998:1630).

The third step is also relevant to the findings of this study and is the clarification of the social goals of the aggressor, based on their interpretation (Martin, 2010:9). Learners stated that they often wanted to retaliate when they felt they had been provoked, even when findings showed that participants were aware that retaliation on their behalf would most likely lead to further acts of aggression. Also, learners understood that relational aggression was a successful tool when used to manipulate friendships and to avoid repercussions of inappropriate behaviour. If one of the above-mentioned statements was the goal of the behaviour, the learner would undoubtedly make use of relational aggression to attain the goal (Martin, 2010:9). Thus, the fourth step, response decision, is activated and the learner would either draw on past experiences or invent new strategies to attain the goal they have set (Martin, 2010:9). In the fifth step, the learner will choose the best response based on the following criteria, as stated by Martin (2010:9):

- What reaction or behaviour will allow the attaining of the social goal?
- Is the reaction or behaviour that has been selected possible to carry out in the context?
- What would the social implications of following the reaction or carrying out the behaviour be?

When learners evaluate their choice of a relationally aggressive strategy, as in this study, it is clear that the outcome of all of the criteria indicated above would be met in a manner that is pleasing to the learner. Findings in this study indicate that the learners perceive relational aggression as a means to an end, and thus a useful means of accomplishing social goals. The choice of a relationally aggressive

response would not be out of context as findings from this study indicate that relational aggression is experienced by learners most often in a group context and that acts could be direct or indirect forms of relationally aggressive acts. Finally, learners are aware of the social hierarchies of their peer groups as well as the identity of their peer groups, so making use of relationally aggressive strategies would be seen as a good way of improving social standing.

The final step, behavioural enactment, is the actual deed being done. Findings in this study confirm that relational aggression is often experienced by intermediate phase learners, and that relational aggression is used as a means to an end, mostly in order to attain a specific social goal.

In the following section, the guidelines for the management of relational aggression in primary schools are discussed.

5.3 GUIDELINES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Since this study aimed to develop and provide guidelines for primary school learners in the Intermediate Phase for the management of instances of relational aggression, these guidelines were developed for learners to use and reinforce. These guidelines had to be cast in a linguistic style that would suit learners in primary school in the middle childhood developmental stage. Its purpose is to make it possible for learners to identify and cope with relational aggression effectively. It is appropriate for both the aggressors and the victims. The findings of this study and the literature consulted indicate that learners who have been involved in instances of relational aggression as aggressors have also experienced relational aggression in some form, and some may even be victims on an ongoing basis. The guidelines are developed to inform the learners of:

5.3.1 The nature of relational aggression

It is vital that learners understand and are sensitised to the concept of relational aggression. They must also understand clearly what types of behaviours are included under the term. Relational aggression is a form of aggression which is often covert in nature and not readily observable. It is aimed at causing harm in relationships and may be direct or indirect acts. Behaviours included in the spectrum of relationally aggressive acts include the following: gossip, spreading rumours, threatening to end

or withhold friendships, exclusion from social groups, ignoring a peer and threatening looks given to victims (Young *et al.*, 2006:308).

5.3.2 The effects of relational aggression

Relational aggression can cause a great deal of damage to a victim and to an aggressor. Victims experiencing forms of relational aggression have expressed feelings of loneliness, rejection, anxiety, fear of social situations, depression. Some victims have indicated that they have suicidal tendencies. Victims of relationally aggressive behaviours have declared that they would prefer to leave their current school and be enrolled in a new school (Leff & Crick, 2010:505). The aggressors have also been found to experience negative development. Their friendship with their peers will become unstable, and often results in the loss of friends from their own peer groups (Leadbeater, 2010:589). Aggressors also often have a false sense of security regarding their ability to maintain control over their peer groups. When these learners are older, they often find it difficult to adjust to a new environment where they are no longer in control of the relationships around them (Leadbeater, 2010:589).

5.3.3 Develop learners' assertiveness and coping skills

The development of assertiveness and positive coping skills may assist learners during a situation where they are experiencing forms of relational aggression (Gomes, 2011:3). These may include, but are not limited to, being excluded from a group, being gossiped about, being ignored, having peers threaten to withdraw a friendship or any other form of relational aggression.

- **Response decision:**

Learners need to understand that they are capable of choosing their response to the displayed behaviour. Learners may still experience intense emotions like hurt or anger. However, if learners develop proactive decision-making skills and assertive skills, they will be able to cope with the situation better and may throw the aggressor off guard. Teaching learners to become assertive may help them to approach the aggressor directly in a manner that is not offensive or rude (Ripley & O'Neil, 2009:13). Learners may make use of expression to indicate that the behaviour of the aggressor is not going to be tolerated or accepted. It has also

been indicated that learners who show nonchalance to aggressors are less likely to be targeted (Gomes, 2011:3).

- ***Reporting the act of relational aggression:***

Learners must be encouraged to report instances of relational aggression to adults, a parent, teacher or another role player (Kuppens *et al.*, 2008:660). At this point the response of the teacher or parent becomes critical. Reports of relational aggression should be addressed immediately and schools need to intervene in such situations. A policy regarding relational aggression in schools would prove useful and may deter learners from employing such forms of aggression as they would be aware of the possible punishment when caught in the act.

5.3.4 Curbing the use of relational aggression

Relational aggression is often used by a learner who wants to be in control of friendships around him/her. Often, other peers will do what the relationally aggressive peer desires as no learner wants to feel excluded or isolated from their peer or social contexts (Geiger *et al.*, 2003:27). Teaching learners about the negative impact of relational aggression may discourage the use thereof. Awareness of the problem will allow other learners to become involved and may effectively lessen the prevalence of direct acts of relational aggression as the bystanders may intervene or support victims.

- ***Promoting awareness of relational aggression:***

Teachers may be approached and asked if they would be willing to speak to their classes about relational aggression such as in the subject, Life Skills, which is taught in the intermediate phase. Learners could raise awareness by designing posters about relational aggression which could be placed in areas around the learners to constantly reinforce the message regarding the use of relational aggression. Once learners become aware of what relational aggression is and how much damage such forms of aggression may cause to both the victim and the aggressor, the prevalence of relational aggression may decrease and incidents will be easier for learners to report.

- ***Developing positive and healthy friendship contexts:***

Learners need to be guided in the development of healthy peer relationships and close friendships. Teaching learners the value of having true friends who are supportive and encouraging may assist them to make better choices of friends.

Learners need to understand that close friendships should not leave them feeling vulnerable or uncomfortable. Peer group evaluations done in class could teach learners to be critical about the behaviour of their peers. It may also serve as an indicator to the teachers of which groups are fostering relationships that are not healthy.

In the following section, the proposed skills for intermediate phase learners who are experiencing relational aggression are provided and discussed.

5.4 PROPOSED SKILLS TO BE DEVELOPED

In order to assist learners who are experiencing relational aggression, certain skills could be taught to them, in order to aid them in effectively coping with relational aggression, as well as to enable them to develop friendships that are healthy. Such skills could be taught to learners in the subject, Life Skills, in which topics regarding friendships, bullying, decision-making and healthy school environments are covered.

‘Skills’ are the range of things a person can do. Skills are learned, and it takes time to master them successfully, even more so when a new skill is being taught to learners (Thompson, 2002:6). Skills development is the process of learning a new skill or a new set of skills, such as relationship skills, social skills or conflict management skills (Thompson, 2002:7).

Regarding relational aggression, I propose that the following skills be taught to learners in order to address the phenomenon of relational aggression they are experiencing in the intermediate phase of primary school:

5.4.1 Relationship and friendships skills

Friendship relationships require several skills from the initial act of friendliness leading to a committed friendship (Crawford, 2009:2). Learners who are experiencing or employing relational aggression on a regular basis, may be lacking in some of these skills, and would benefit much from making use of such skills to ensure that relational aggression does not negatively impact on their peer relationships. Also, healthy friendships and peer relationships offer support for learners who are experiencing difficulties, and may even be utilised as a coping skill in times of distress, for example, when acts of relational aggression targets a specific learner (Crawford, 2009:2). These skills include the following:

- Effective communication skills: Learners need to develop skills that will enable them to communicate with their peers effectively. Learners can practise speaking in a clear manner and maintaining eye contact when interacting with others. Listening skills form an integral part of communication skills and should be practised in order for effective communication to take place (Crawford, 2009:2).
- Interpersonal friendships skills: These are different skills that are necessary to be practised between peers in a friendship. Learners need to develop respect for each other's opinions and ideas, value each other's confidences and ensure each other of trustworthiness, engage in activities that are enjoyable and practice companionship (Crawford, 2009:2).
- Learners need to be able to present themselves as resourceful and enjoyable companions by practising friendliness and an openness to accept others (Asher, Parker & Walker, 1996:366).

5.4.2 Assertiveness skills

Learners who are experiencing relationally aggressive acts could benefit greatly from learning to act in an assertive manner. Assertiveness is the ability to respond to a situation in which one is uncomfortable or threatened without responding aggressively, yet firmly conveying one's feelings regarding the situation. When a learner has learnt the skill of assertiveness, such a learner will be able to respond to aggressors in a manner that is tactful and constructive but firm (Thompson, 2002:40). Assertiveness could be taught to learners by teaching them to communicate by making use of clear messages (Grose, 2008:1), for example, "I feel upset that you are ignoring me and I would like to know why you are behaving in such a nasty manner." Directly and honestly approaching an aggressor could be more effective than trying to understand the behaviour of an aggressor when learners are too afraid to approach the aggressor and rely on assumptions only. Thompson (2002:40) provides eight steps to developing assertiveness. These steps could be taught to learners in order to teach them how to be assertive in their peer relationships and how to respond to instances of relational aggression in an assertive manner:

- Stand up for yourself and ensure that other learners understand that you are not going to let anyone walk over you.
- Do not be afraid of voicing how you feel to a person or peer who has upset or hurt you. By keeping quiet, the behaviour will continue.

- Stand up for what you believe in and learn to say exactly what you feel in an honest and open manner.
- Do not change who you are, or ignore your feelings when you are around different people. By doing so you are going to cause long term damage to your relationships which may have been otherwise healthy.
- Ensure that your friendships are authentic and allow others to be honest with you.
- Take time to let other people know how you feel and think about different things.
- Every individual has rights and by being non-assertive you are sacrificing some of your rights. Never allow other people to take advantage of you because you are too scared to stand up for yourself.
- When another person's behaviour or actions hurt you, or affects you in a negative manner, confront that person about such behaviours in a tactful way and allow that person to respond to your request to change their behaviours. (Thompson, 2002:41)

The following section provides the skills necessary for learners to master in order to manage conflict effectively.

5.4.3 Conflict resolution skills

Conflict is inevitable in any relationship, even more so when learners are interacting with each other and learning how to interact in a social manner. When learners do find themselves in a conflict situation, skills regarding the resolution thereof are vital for the maintenance of such a friendship. The inability to solve conflict situations will result in the friendship ending, or in emotional damage being caused to both parties. In the case of relational aggression and the conflict that arises in such situations, the effective management of conflict resolution may enable a learner to prevent the acts of relational aggression continuing and, should the relational aggression be employed between two friends, help both the aggressor and the victim to maintain and strengthen their friendship.

Asher *et al.* (1996:366) suggest that the best approach to conflict resolution is open discussion, negotiation and compromise from both parties. Learners need to learn how to tolerate differences between each other and they need to learn how to consult resources that may enable them to solve their conflict situations, like reporting the

situation to a teacher or a parent who may be able to assist them in the resolution of the situation (Asher *et al.*, 1996:368). The final skill that needs to be taught to learners regarding conflict management is the ability to practise forgiveness.

The Women's and Children's Health Network (2011) presented a conflict resolution model which has been simplified and aims to assist learners in the effective management of conflict. Such a model could assist teachers in the conveying of conflict resolution skills and is illustrated below:

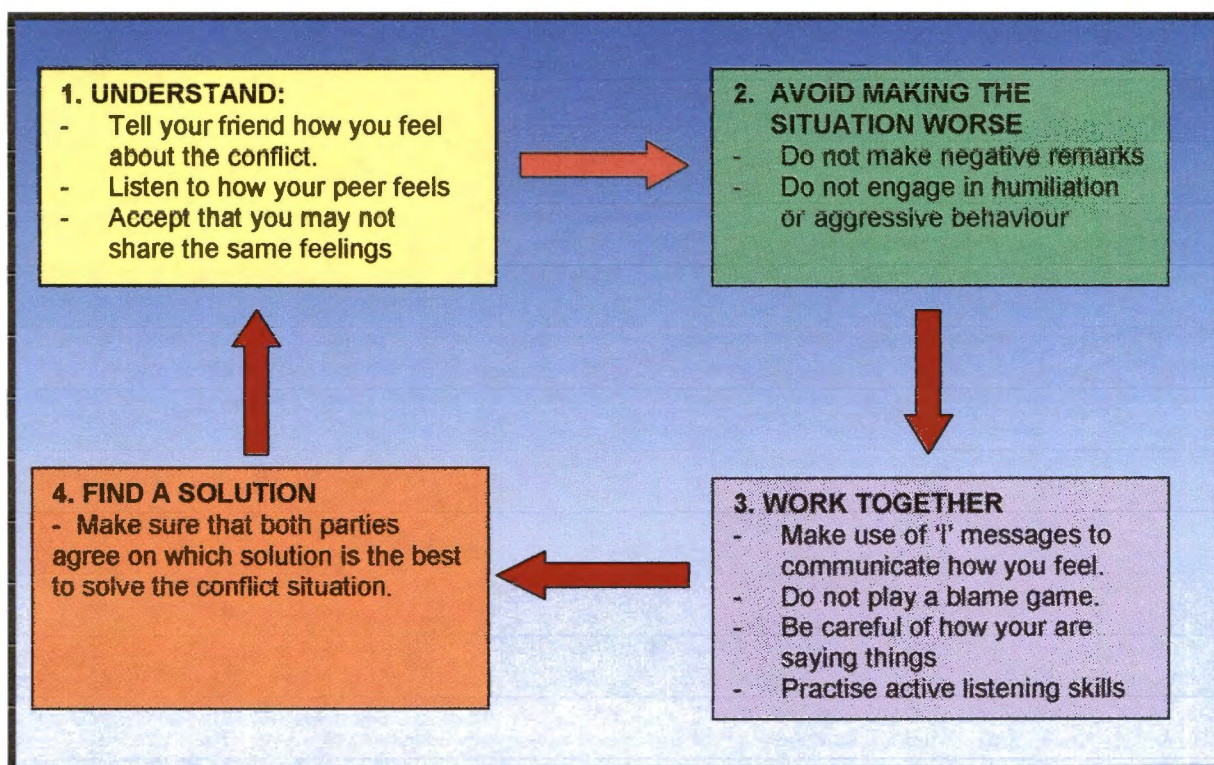


DIAGRAM 4.2 Simplified conflict resolution model (Adapted from Women and Children's Health Network, 2011).

The following section provides the recommendations made in this study by Ifor further study.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations for further research stem from this study. *Firstly*, there is a possibility that relational aggression begins in the foundation phase education and continues into adulthood. Exploring relational aggression in these various developmental stages may therefore be useful in providing a deeper understanding

of how relationally aggressive behaviours are learnt and how the behaviour changes during the various phases of development. *Secondly*, conducting a study of quantitative design may indicate the frequency of relational aggression amongst learners and may serve as evidence for much needed intervention from authority. *Thirdly*, research into more specific aspects of relational aggression like the functions, the gender differences, socio-economic influences and so on, may shed light on factors that are facilitating or inhibiting the development of relational aggression and will undoubtedly assist in the development of intervention programmes and guidelines.

I would recommend the use of narratives together with interviews as strategies to collect data to provide insight into various emotions of learners who are experiencing relational aggression. Narratives could elicit responses that would lead to deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Finally, it is possible to make several recommendations for practise therefore to teachers. It is clear from the findings that relational aggression needs to be addressed in primary school education. Learners can be made aware of the negative effects of making use of relational aggression and what types of behaviours are included. Teachers need to be informed about what relational aggression is and what the detrimental effects of such behaviour will be if it is not addressed. Also, teachers need to be trained in intervention methods and programmes in order to address relational aggression amongst learners they deal with. Parents may also benefit from becoming informed about relational aggression and how it affects their children as well as how to respond to acts of relational aggression and to offer management strategies. Schools could develop and run programmes that are aimed at specifically eliminating behaviours like relational aggression and include relationally aggressive behaviours in their code of conduct. They could also teach the proactive skills to learners that are provided in section 5.5 of this chapter. It is essential for all the role players involved in the lives of the learners to be fully aware of relational aggression and be able to assist the learners who are experiencing or practising acts of relational aggression. Intervention must be done in a positive and proactive manner that will ultimately encourage healthy friendships and help learners to maintain mental well-being.

5.6 LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. The limitations are: *firstly*, the study focuses only on the intermediate phase of primary school education and the perceptions that those learners hold of relational aggression in their schools. The study did not explore relational aggression in any other phase of school education. It should be noted, however, that this does provide support for further study regarding relational aggression in other phases that may shed more light on the phenomenon in the South African school context. *Secondly*, this study is qualitative in nature and although it provided a deeper insight into a lesser explored form of aggression, the study cannot be used to make generalisations on the prevalence of relational aggression in primary schools. What it does is to confirm that relational aggression is occurring and that there is an urgent need for intervention. This study is limited to exploring and understanding the perceptions and experiences of particular learners in the intermediate phase only.

5.7 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

Physical forms of aggression have received a great deal of attention in national and international research. Relational aggression, although not as easy to observe or to intervene in, may potentially cause more harm than forms of physical or verbal aggression. It may mean learners who are victimised over an extended period of time may be unable to function successfully in social environments. In South African primary schools, issues regarding relational aggression have not yet been successfully addressed. It appears that teachers and parents are unaware of the alarming rate at which it occurs amongst learners who are in a critical stage of their development, not only socially, but also cognitively and emotionally. At present school authorities intervene and address situations in which physical and verbal acts of aggression are committed without hesitation. Unlike physical and verbal aggression, relational aggression is not readily observable because of its uniquely covert nature. It is also difficult to detect because it is mostly committed amongst learners in peer groups. This often allows the aggressor to remain anonymous.

This study indicated that learners in the participating primary schools were experiencing relational aggression. Learners expressed perceptions regarding relational aggression that suggested that the matter was being addressed in a dismissive manner, if it was addressed at all. Learners were aware of the functions of

relational aggression in social groups and the general school environment and indicated that the learners who are perceived as relationally aggressive appear to be popular among and well-liked by both the teachers and peers. Learners who were identified as relationally aggressive managed to maintain almost spotless reputations in the eyes of their teachers. Learners perceive teachers as having immense misconceptions of relationally aggressive learners. Learners who practise relational aggression are well aware of how unlikely it is that they will be reproached or punished if their actions are reported by their victims. Findings indicate that learners are likely to make use of relational aggression to attain social goals, control peer groups and to retaliate when provoked. The findings show that learners are making an alarming use of relationally aggressive acts in social environments. This indicates a pressing need for further research.

The use of relational aggression can lead to intense emotional distress, leading to extensive damage over an extended period of time. Learners in this study who were involved in acts of relational aggression were well aware of the impact their behaviour could have on others. The findings in this study indicate that aggressors have been or are victims on a regular basis. Incidents of humiliation in front of peers, peer rejection and social isolation were recalled in great detail. Learners do not appear to be loath to make use of it since it only offers rewards from their point of view. Learners placed a large emphasis on their need to be amongst friends and clearly expressed their desire to belong and be in a group of friends. Without successful intervention by role players, specifically teachers, in the education system, acts of relational aggression will continue to negatively affect many learners on a daily basis.

Finally, this study has provided guidelines for learners who are involved in instances of relational aggression, whether they were bystanders, aggressors or victims. These guidelines are aimed at providing learners with skills and coping measures that will aid them when they find themselves in situations in which relational aggression is being employed, observed or experienced.

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Annexure A



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
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Privaatsak X6001

Potchefstroom 2520

Tel (018) 299 4705

Faks (018) 299 4712

E-pos: 22052909@nwu.ac.za

**Head of Department: Basic Education North West
Private Bag
Potchefstroom
2531**

Dear Colleague

**APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR MED DEGREE IN LEARNER
SUPPORT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE**

My name is Annemarie Magdaleen du Plessis. I am current completing my Master's degree in Learner Support.

The title of the research project is: **"Perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools"**. The aim of the research is to explore the phenomenon of relational aggression as it manifests in primary schools. I herewith request permission to conduct research at primary schools in the North West Province. The data collection entails a peer nomination process which is completely voluntary and anonymous and will be followed with individual interviews with selected learners who choose to participate in the Intermediate phase of primary school education. Learners chosen for interviews will be notified and all the interviews are confidential and participation is voluntary.

No party will receive any remuneration for participation, however, learners do receive an opportunity to be heard and voice their opinion about this form of aggression as they are experiencing it. The data collected will enable the researcher to better understand the phenomenon of relational aggression and will allow for the compilation of guidelines which will be given to participating schools that will enable teachers to better assist learners who are experiencing relational aggression as either victim or aggressor.

Thank you for your attention

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'AduPlessis'.

**A.M. Du Plessis
(MEd STUDENT)
071 678 4680**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'AJ Botha'.

**Dr AJ BOTHA
STUDY LEADER**



education

Lefapha la Thuto
Onderwys Departement
Department of Education
NORTH WEST PROVINCE

Teemane Building
8 O R Tambo Street
Private Bag X1256
POTCHEFSTROOM 2520
Tel.: (018) 294-8216
Fax: (018) 294-8234
Enquiries: MR H MOTARA
e-mail: hmotara@nwpp.gov.za

DR KENNETH KAUNDA DISTRICT

DIRECTOR: PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

10 March 2011

Ms A M du Plessis
M.Ed candidate
North West University
Potchefstroom Campus

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH "PERCEPTIONS OF RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN METROPOLITAN AND RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS" AT ONE PRIMARY FARM SCHOOL AND ONE METROPOLITAN PRIMARY SCHOOL - POTCHEFSTROOM AREA OFFICE - DR KENNETH KAUNDA DISTRICT

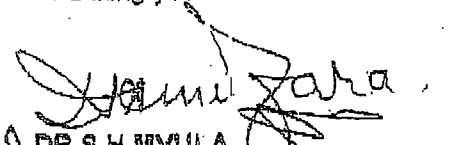
The above matter refers.

Permission is hereby granted to you to conduct research in the Potchefstroom Area Office, Dr Kenneth Kaunda District under the following provisions:

- > the activities you undertake at school should not tamper with the normal process of learning and teaching;
- > you inform the principals of your identified schools of your impending visit and activity;
- > you provide my office with a report in respect of your findings from the research; and
- > you obtain prior permission from this office before availing your findings for public or media consumption.

Wishing you well in your endeavour.

Thanking you


DR S H MVULA
DISTRICT EXECUTIVE MANAGER
DR KENNETH KAUNDA DISTRICT

cc Ms S Yssel - Area Manager, Potchefstroom

Annexure B



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
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The questionnaire used during anonymous peer nominations in *phase one* of the data collection process:

1. Who do you like the most in your class?
*2. Who do you like the least in your grade?
*3. Who leaves friends out when they are angry with them?
4. Who gets along with most of the children in your grade?
*5. Who will easily spread a nasty rumour about someone in your class that they don't like?
6. Who do you think is very unhappy at school because no one wants to play with them?
*7. Who likes to "diss" his/her friends when there are other people around?
*8. Who will tell you that they won't play with you if you talk to a person they don't like?
9. Who do you get on the best with in your grade?
*10. Who likes to gossip about others in your class?
*11. Who would you not want to tell a secret to in your class?
*12. Which learner in your class will break up friendships when they are angry or upset?
13. Who is the friendliest person in your class?
*14. Who will easily write an ugly letter about another child in your class?
*15. Who do you not want to be friends with in your class because they are often mean to other children?
16. Who would you like to play with in your class?

*Questions that will be used to identify relationally aggressive learners.



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E-pos:

22052909@nwu.ac.z

Dear SGB Chairperson

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR M.Ed DEGREE IN LEARNER SUPPORT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE

My name is Annemarie Magdaleen du Plessis. I am current completing my Master's degree in Learner Support.

The title of the research project is: **"Perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools"**. The aim of the research is to explore the phenomenon of relational aggression as it manifests in primary schools. I herewith request permission to conduct research at your school. The data collection entails a peer nomination process which is completely voluntary and anonymous and will be followed with individual interviews with selected learners who choose to participate in the Intermediate phase of primary school education. Learners chosen for interviews will be notified and all the interviews are confidential and participation is voluntary.

No party will receive any remuneration for participation, however, learners do receive an opportunity to be heard and voice their opinion about this form of aggression as they are experiencing it. The data collected will enable the researcher to better understand the phenomenon of relational aggression and will allow for the compilation of guidelines which will be given to participating schools that will enable teachers to better assist learners who are experiencing relational aggression as either victim or aggressor.

Thank you for your attention

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'AduPlessis'.

A.M. Du Plessis
(MEd STUDENT)
071 678 4680

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'AJ Botha'.

Dr AJ BOTHA
STUDY LEADER



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Tel (018) 299 4705

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E-pos:

22052909@nwu.ac.za

Dear Principal

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR MED DEGREE IN LEARNER SUPPORT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE

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Thank you for your attention

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'AduPlessis'.

**A.M. Du Plessis
(MEd STUDENT)
071 678 4680**

**Dr AJ BOTHA
STUDY LEADER**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'AJ BOTHA'.



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Dear Teachers

**APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR MEd DEGREE IN LEARNER
SUPPORT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE**

My name is Annemarie Magdaleen du Plessis. I am current completing my Master's degree in Learner Support.

The title of the research project is: "**Perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools**". The aim of the research is to explore the phenomenon of relational aggression as it manifests in primary schools. I herewith request permission to conduct research at your school. The data collection entails a peer nomination process which is completely voluntary and anonymous and will be followed with individual interviews with selected learners who choose to participate in the Intermediate phase of primary school education. Learners chosen for interviews will be notified and all the interviews are confidential and participation is voluntary.

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Thank you for your attention

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'AduPlessis'.

A.M. Du Plessis
(MEd STUDENT)
071 678 4680

Dr AJ BOTHA
STUDY LEADER

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'AJ BOTHA'.

Annexure F



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Potchefstroom 2520

Tel (018) 299 4705

Faks (018) 299 4712

Dear Parents

REQUEST FOR CONSENT FOR YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Annemarie Magdaleen du Plessis. I am current completing my Master's degree in Learner Support.

The title of the research project is: "**Perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools**". The aim of the research is to explore the phenomenon of relational aggression as it manifests in primary schools. I herewith request permission FOR YOUR CHILD to be able to take part in my research project. The data collection entails a peer nomination process which is completely voluntary and anonymous and will be followed with individual interviews with selected learners who choose to participate in the Intermediate phase of primary school education. Learners chosen for interviews will be notified and all the interviews are confidential and participation is voluntary and your child is under no obligation to take part in the study.

No party will receive any remuneration for participation, however, learners do receive an opportunity to be heard and voice their opinion about this form of aggression as they are experiencing it. The data collected will enable the researcher to better understand the phenomenon of relational aggression and will allow for the compilation of guidelines which will be given to participating schools that will enable teachers to better assist learners who are experiencing relational aggression as either victim or aggressor.

Thank you for your attention

Yours sincerely,

A.M. Du Plessis
MEd STUDENT
071 678 4680

Dr AJ BOTHA (STUDY LEADER)

SHOULD YOU AS PARENT/GUARDIAN AGREE, YOU HEREBY GIVE CONSENT FOR YOUR CHILD TO THE PARTICIPATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

I..... (parent / guardian) hereby give my child
..... in grade permission to participate in
the research project.

Signed: Parent / Guardian: Date



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Dear Participant

REQUEST FOR ASSENT TO TAKE PART IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Annemarie Magdaleen du Plessis. I am current completing my Master's degree in Learner Support at the North West University.

I am currently engaged in a research project entitled: **"Perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools"**. The aim of the research is to explore the phenomenon of relational aggression as it manifests in primary schools. I herewith request permission FROM YOU to take part in my research project. The data collection entails a peer nomination process which is completely voluntary and anonymous and will be followed with individual interviews with you if you choose to participate. The interviews are confidential and your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part in the study. You reserve the right to withdraw assent at any stage during the research process.

Thank you for your participation.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'AduPlessis'.

A.M. Du Plessis

MEd STUDENT
071 678 4680

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'AJ Botha'.

Dr AJ BOTHA (STUDY LEADER)

SHOULD YOU AGREE, YOU HEREBY GIVE ASSENT TO THE PARTICIPATION OF THE RESEARCH

I..... hereby give my permission to participate in the research project and I give my permission for this interview to be audio taped.

Participant: Grade 4

Female

10 years old

Identified by peers as most relationally aggressive in class.

Reflective Notes	Transcript	Codes
	Interviewer: Vertel vir juffrou hoe gaan jy 'n kind terug kry wat iets aan jou gedoen het terug kry, amper straf, sonder dat die juffrou daarvan uitvind? Kind: ummmm...Ek weet nie regtig nie...as iemand met my lelik is dan vra ek my ma moet ek hom terug kry of iets dan voel ek dis nie reg nie want umm...toe die Here op die kruis gesterf het het hy mos gese hulle bedoel dit nie regtig nie so ek wil soos in 'n kind van die Here wees en ek wil nie baklei nie. Interviewer: Dink jy mens doen soms goed wat lelik is en ander kinders seer maak maar ons het dit dalk nie so bedoel nie? Kind: Ja want een keer toe speel ek en dis my maatjie en se sy nou nee al die kinders baklei met haar en vertel vir haar lelike goed en dit maak haar hartseer en sy se dit maak haar hartseer as ek vir haar lag en toe vertel sy vir my dat haar spot. het my en haar bo op mekaar laat val en toe se sy vir almal ons doen lelike goed...ek weet nie wat nie maar ons het bo op mekaar gele en to is ek ook hartseer. Interviewer: Ek kan dink dat dit jou baie ontstel het. Is daar kinders by die skool wat lelik is en gemeen is. Vertel my van daai kinders. Wat doen hulle? Kind: In die klas gebeur dit die meeste. As die juffrou haar rug draai dan doen hulle dit en as ek vir juffrou gaan se dan se sy net ja, maar sy weet nie eintelik wat gebeur nie. Interviewer: Dink jy die juffrou weet watter maaikies in die klas is die wat lelik is met die ander kinders? Kind: Nee. Hukom Partykeer is dit die soetste kinders in die klas en dit lyk nie asof hulle ooit so iets sal doen nie. Hulle is juffrou se wit broodjies en niemand sal met hulle raas nie. Interviewer: Watse tipe goed doen hierdie kinders alles? Kind: Ummm, hulle sal die meeste tye sal hulle se jy is misluk met ander kinders, maar ek sal nou nie se ek is nooit so met ander kinders nie want ek is nogal. maar ummm...as ek met 'n maatjie lelik is kan ek nie slaap nie want dan voel ek sleg so ek voel net dis nie reg nie. As jy met 'n kind baklei moet jy dit regmaak want anders gaan mense uitvind. As hy nou nie vir jou vergewe nie is dit 'n probleem. Interviewer: Dink jy daar is baie kinders wat ander kinders terg en skinder stories vertel? Kind: Ummm, ... ek dink so want daar is kinders wat heeldag skinder by die skool en wat altyd weet wat aangaan en ummm.... Interviewer: Is daai kinders wat al die stories ken gewild? Kom ek vra jou eerder so....wil ander kinders met daai kinders speel? Kind: Die kinders wat daai kinders ken wil nie met hulle speel nie want hulle weet wat hulle doen maar die kinders wat nuut in die skool is speel altyd met hulle. Soos my maatjie	

Annexure I

LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

Dr Elaine Ridge
Freelance Editor and Translator
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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to attest that I have edited the language of A.M. du Plessis's minor dissertation, **"Learners' perceptions of relational aggression in metropolitan and rural primary schools"**.



(Dr) Elaine Ridge BA UED (Natal) DEd (Stell)

Freelance Editor and Translator

15 September 2012

Annexure J

Biographical details of interview participants

Participant number	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Grade
1	Male	White	10	4
2	Female	White	10	4
3	Male	White	10	4
4	Male	White	10	4
5	Female	White	10	5
6	Male	White	12	6
7	Male	White	12	6
8	Female	White	11	6
9	Female	White	10	5
10	Female	White	11	5
11	Male	White	10	4
12	Female	White	10	4
13	Female	White	12	6
14	Male	White	12	6
15	Female	White	10	5
16	Female	White	12	6
17	Female	White	12	6
18	Male	White	10	5
19	Male	White	11	6
20	Female	White	12	6
21	Male	Black	12	6
22	Female	Black	11	5
23	Female	Black	12	6
24	Female	Black	11	5
25	Male	Black	10	4