Male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase

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ABSTRACT

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Empirical studies have documented aggression in children as a typical, normal developmental phenomenon, characterized as having the highest levels of aggression between the ages of two and three, and gradually declining by early childhood. However, the escalating levels of aggression by children within the teaching-learning environment, as emphasized by the media, crime statistics and relevant research studies, presents an apparent incongruence. This propelled the need to address aggression as experienced by male learners in school during the Intermediate Phase. Masculinity was an important lens in contextualizing male learners’ experiences of aggression to help explore and describe to what extent, if any, male learners do experience aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase.

A qualitative study with a phenomenological approach, within the protocol of ethical procedures and measures of trustworthiness, was conducted to explore and describe male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase. Twenty-seven middle-childhood male learners aged 9 to 11 from grades four to six from three primary schools in District D14 in Lenasia participated in the process of phenomenological interviewing in one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

An interpretive data analysis by means of Tesch’s open-coding systematic process proffered the following findings: Firstly, Intermediate Phase male learners described aggression using concrete examples of their lived experience and these experiences of aggression translated into verbal and physical aggression as the ‘fight instinct’. In addition, these experiences of aggression indicated male learners’ middle-childhood developmental stage and their experience of aggression as a feeling of anger and a justification of their aggressive behaviour.

Secondly, male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase formed a cycle of aggression with a focus on the role of school authority in the management of aggression and resolution of conflict, where male learners’ experienced gangs and bullies as provocation for them to behave aggressively in return, and gender identity and gender roles were constructed and interpreted within the framework of the Sex Role Socialisation Theory. Thirdly, Intermediate Phase learners made suggestions in managing their own and others’ aggression in terms of self-regulation, morality and religion.
Whilst masculinity is an elusive and ambiguous concept, the manifestation of aggressive behaviours by male learners within the context of the adapted definition of masculinity as a negotiation of ‘cognitive, behavioural, emotionally expressive, psychosocial and socio-cultural experience’ indicated that male learners aspire to the ‘way men are’ or are in pursuit of being ‘real men.’ A subtle form of hegemonic masculinity alluding to dominance, power and competiveness was evident in the male learners’ practice of aggression.

The findings validate the notion that male learners psychological wellbeing is at risk should the cycle of aggression persist. Hence, the researcher suggests that learners need to be skilled in ameliorating aggression by means of a process of teachers demonstrating and skilling learners in identifying conflict and resolving conflict; a coaching model should be adopted and implemented to train learners to manage aggression; the sensitization of gender roles, namely masculinity; and that counsellors and qualified psychologists be available at schools. Guidelines were described from the themes emanating from male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase. A valuable contribution from the research study was that learners had the platform to be heard and that some found the interview process interesting.

**Key concepts:**

Intermediate Phase, middle childhood, male, masculinity, learners, experience, aggression, school
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CHAPTER ONE
RATIONALE AND OVERVIEW

1.1 GENERAL PROBLEM STATEMENT

“Stabbed schoolboy dies” (News 24, 2008a), “Schoolboy goes on the rampage” (News 24, 2008b), “Schoolgirl gang raped in Johannesburg” (News 24, 2010) and “Sword killings shock MEC” (News 24, 2008c) are news headlines indicative of the escalating levels of violent and aggressive behaviour perpetrated in South African schools, which is also the reality reflected in the article “Aggression common in schools” (News 24, 2008d). School violence is not endemic to South Africa but is an upward global trend, as reported in “True impact of violence on our education system” (The Skills Portal, 2011). Apart from the fact that these headlines highlight that aggressive behaviour is fast becoming a common occurrence in South African schools and are a reflection of “what is happening in our society” according to Myburgh (News 24, 2008d), it also reveals the concerns and implications pertaining to the “government, teaching profession and civil society” as documented by the South African Council of Educators (SACE, 2011).

Whilst many causal factors can be attributed to the serious dimensions of aggression and violence both globally and in South African schools, it is necessary to examine the present culture of violence in South Africa historically. Beneath the surface of South Africa’s political, constitutional, economic and social transformation is an inherited “culture of violence” (Bezuidenhout, 2003:6). Consequently, the marginalization of post-adolescent males has rendered them powerless, insecure and emasculated resulting in displaced aggression (Simpson, 1992). Moreover, unemployment, overcrowded classrooms, under-resourced schools, stress and the HIV pandemic seem to contribute “to the increasing aggression” (Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2009:446), crime, violence, vigilantism and the ever-so-recent xenophobia and the all too familiar sight of violent service-delivery protests. Violent public demonstrations seem to be the only way to visibly give voice to one’s grievances. Exposure to phenomena such as these is becoming a “subtly socially sanctioned” (Simpson, 1992) norm for most South African children which socialises them towards being desensitised to violence. This valid concern is addressed by Gibson (1991), as to whether violence begets violence when children are exposed to violence.
Alarming statistics on a study of violence in South African schools (Van Wyk, 2008) serves to indicate the extent of aggression permeating both primary and high schools. Nieuwoudt (2008) reports that the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) supports these findings in the Report of the Public Hearing on School-based Violence which found that one out of every four children said “... that they had experienced violence at school.” The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP, 2012) provided findings that one in ten primary school learners had experienced parental consumption of illegal drugs and one in five secondary school children had experienced parent and sibling imprisonment, which could translate into violence at school. According to Stavrou (1993:7-9) 80% of children exposed to violence exhibit post-traumatic stress disorders in the consecutive years. In the face of such disturbing statistics which indicate the trend and effects of spiralling aggression and violence, one needs to ponder the fact that some children in middle-childhood (Intermediate Phase learners) could be at risk of exhibiting aggression if they had an exposure to violence.

As media details the frequency of aggressive behaviour of learners in South African schools, “protecting the fundamental rights of victims ... must be a priority” (Kruger, 2010) in terms of counselling and support at schools. The causes instigating such behaviours and the consequences of the negative impact on the victims, the aggressors and the teaching and learning situation are frequently unaddressed and neglected. The issues of trauma, pain, humiliation, anxiety and anger are often sidelined. Vally, Dolombisa and Porteus (2002:81) documented the aforementioned concern in the SAHRC report on violence. This report noted the absence of “nationally instituted programmes to assist teachers and learners cope with anti-discrimination and violence prevention” even though the SAHRC had recommended that a programme be implemented to address the climate of aggression.

Shefer, Ratele, Strebel, Shabalala and Buikema (2007:1) contend that gender-based violence continues to be endemic in South Africa and that statistics indicate that physical aggression and violence amongst male learners surpasses that of females. Similarly Arnot and Mac an Ghaill (2006:38) documented that the ratio for gender aggression amongst juveniles are 1:1 and teenagers are 4:1. The Columbine High School shooting massacre in America documents that whilst the victims included both boys and girls, the perpetrators were male (Fiske, 2010). Furthermore, Connell (2002:1) states that an “establishment pattern of violence has become the norm for boys” whilst Ratele (2006:295) advocates that violent attacks are linked to masculinities and gender power. Needless to say however, explanations for these gendered distinctions have to be explored as male learners experiences of aggression is “not a fixed propensity” (Connell, 2005:258) to masculinity as other factors also contribute to the high incidence of aggression in males.
Unless such aggressive behaviours are addressed, the long-term effects could manifest in some type of maladjustment or personality disorder and even impact on constructive relationships, mental health and the ability to manage conflict simply because the matter had been neglected or access to treatment was unavailable (Botha, 2012). Adopting the proverbial saying of prevention is better than cure could prevent children becoming “violent offenders of tomorrow” (Van Baardewijk, Stegge, Bushman & Vermeiren, 2009:723). Connor (2007) concurs that “physical aggression in children is a major public problem” and “is not only an indicator of aggression in adulthood but also leads to other behavioural problems such as alcohol and drug abuse, violent crime and continues the cycle of abusive parenting.” It is therefore imperative to understand what problems or frustrations inform aggressive behaviour and what proactive measures could be taken to avoid or remedy existing problems, thereby accepting the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2009) which is established in terms of the Constitution (Bill of Rights) and the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 and Act 108 of 1996 (Oosthuizen & Rossouw, 2009:19-23, 72).

Goldstein, Carr, Davidson and Wehr (1981:517) state that “society has no formal explicit means” whereby people are educated on how to “manage conflict, handle aggression and eschew violence.” It may be argued in response, that the Life Orientation (Department of Education, 2003) and Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2011) within the South African National Curriculum provides for the training and development of specific behaviours, values and skills in coping with challenging situations in non-destructive ways. The researcher is of the opinion that education on gender issues is lacking, more specifically, on masculinity. Connell (2005:238-240) agreeably advocates that varied masculinities should be addressed in school studies for the purposes of mental health and for the amelioration of aggression and violence.

Notably, aggression in children is described as typically natural, normal and “highly frequent in developing” children (Connor, 2002:29). Moreover, research studies document that aggression peaks around 2-3 years and then gradually declines by early childhood (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2010:401). Furthermore, hostile aggression peaks in early adolescence 13 to 15 years of age and declines thereafter (Shaffer, 1996:546). With early childhood and adolescence on opposite ends of the developmental stages of children, the question of what about middle-childhood aggression comes to the fore. Arguably, if aggression is perceived as reasonably stable in middle-childhood then how does one account for the increased levels of aggressive behaviours among learners within the South African school context (Van Wyk, 2008). The researcher’s reflections on the above discussion contrast with the early beliefs of the developmental progression of aggression. As aggressive behaviour of males is
constructed and labeled as “gender traditional” (Francis, 2006:24), it is important to reflect and analyse on the status quo of this categorization.

For this purpose, focus is placed on the male learner in middle childhood within the Intermediate Phase. If aggression declines and subsides by early childhood (5-6 year old) (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2010:401), what reasoning and explanations can be attributed to the instances and nature of aggression in middle childhood, Intermediate Phase (9-11 year old) learners? Furthermore, what is the rationale for male learners' tendencies to aggress more than the female learners? In an attempt to elicit answers to the above enquiry, it is the intent of the researcher to explore and describe male learners' experiences of aggression in school from a masculinity perspective in the middle-childhood Intermediate Phase in South African schools.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

In view of this increase of violence and aggression in South African schools, the researcher's motivation to conduct research stems from the challenges of aggressive behaviour in the researcher’s immediate school environment. The researcher is a Foundation Phase teacher at a primary school with an enrolment of approximately 1100 learners in a low socio-economic environment, in Lenasia, Gauteng. Teachers in the school have taken cognizance of the increase in aggressive behaviours and misconduct, varying in nature and severity, but particularly from Intermediate Phase male learners. Aggression is exhibited physically, verbally and psychologically. A common defining feature characterising a fight between male learners is the chant “fairgo” and “goerie” (meaning fight) by on looking peers. Management and teachers constantly have to deal with the aggressors and the victims. In addition to this dilemma, parents of the victims complain of teachers and management not attending to the problems of aggressive behaviours efficiently and timeously. One can only imagine the stress experienced by all concerned as well as the implications on teaching-learning, motivation, loss of valuable contact time and severed social relations and its negative impact on society. The above discussion presents legitimate grievances on escalating levels of aggression that need to be addressed.
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question that guided the study of Intermediate Phase male learners’ experiences of aggression in school is “What are the male learners’ experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase?” This research question was elucidated further by the following sub-questions:

- How do Intermediate Phase male learners experience aggression in school?
- To what extent, if any, does the Intermediate Phase male learners’ masculinity influence their experiences of aggression in school?
- What guidelines could be developed and described to assist Intermediate Phase male learners’ to cope with and manage aggression in school?

1.4 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

Three research aims were formulated from the central research question.

- To explore male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase
- To explore and describe the influence of masculinity on the experiences of male learners’ experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase
- To develop and describe guidelines to assist male learners in order to cope with and manage aggression in school

1.5 THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The purpose of this research study evolves from the discussion as outlined in the problem statement. Research studies have found that aggression is a natural developmental phenomenon characterized by the highest levels of aggression at two years old and “subsiding in each subsequent year until a relatively low” (Stratton, 2005:1; Shaffer, 1996:593). These views contradict the growing concerns of escalating levels of aggression by children and adolescents within the teaching-learning environment as emphasized by the media and relevant research studies (Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2009). In addition, national institutions are declaring that boys’ behaviours are problematic and that violence and criminality, amongst other issues, appear to be linked to a “crisis in masculinity” (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2002:75). This apparent incongruence propels the need to address aggression as experienced by Intermediate Phase male learners in school using the lens of
a masculinity perspective. The notion of distance between early childhood aggression and adolescent aggression also presents a ‘gap’ (Fink, 2010:12) in knowledge of what the reality of aggression in middle-childhood developmental phase is, specifically middle-childhood male learners in the Intermediate Phase of Primary Schools.

Since a number of studies (Botha, 2006; Musekene, 2005) addressed secondary schools learners and teachers’ experiences of aggression, a qualitative phenomenological study devoted to understanding Intermediate Phase male learners’ lived experiences in middle childhood best lent itself for exploring male learners’ experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase within a South African primary school context.

1.6 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVES

The acquisition of a scientific understanding of Intermediate Phase male learners’ experiences of aggression in school depends on the researcher’s understanding of the world or “ways of seeing the world” (Lichtman, 2010:7). These views of the world (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2007:31) guide the researcher to make certain assumptions about the world. Three pertinent lenses can be employed in the research practice:

- Ontological assumptions
- Epistemological assumptions
- Methodological assumptions
- General assumptions

1.6.1 Ontological Assumptions

The ontological assumption which guides the purpose of a research project is a description of an objective reality. For purposes of clarification ontology is defined as the “study of being” or “reality” (Mouton, 1996:8). In this study with the main purpose of gaining an understanding of the reality of male learners’ experience of aggression in school, a thorough conceptualisation of the phenomenon of aggression, an observation of the social lives of the middle-childhood male learners and their experiences of aggression within the school context will constitute the basic ontological assumption which is informed by the assumption that “social reality can be understood from an external point of view” (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2007:31). By implication the researcher assumes that middle-childhood male learners live in a world in which they each have unique thoughts, emotions and ideas to which they attribute meaning.
Therefore the investigation of the phenomenon of aggression as experienced by Intermediate Phase male learners would operate within an interpretive approach (Crotty, 2009:67) for the purposes of acquiring understanding.

1.6.2 Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemology is concerned with the search for “truth” or “truthful knowledge” (Mouton, 1996:28) in the course of a scientific inquiry. As legitimacy and adequacy are vital prerequisites of the eventual research findings, the epistemological stance employed in this study is constructivist (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a:51). An interpretive study implies that meanings will be constructed from the interpretations of the semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews. Since absolute truth from the learners’ lived experiences of the phenomenon of aggression within a social context is not entirely possible, the researcher will present recommendations at the conclusion of the study.

As the study follows an interpretive stance with a qualitative approach the researcher subscribes to the following assumptions about middle-childhood male learners in the Intermediate Phase:

- they have experienced aggression either as a victim or as a perpetrator;
- they will respond to the invitation to volunteer to participate in the research project;
- they will willingly participate in the semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews; and
- middle-childhood male learners’ experiences of aggression have relevance to the masculinity perspective.

1.6.3 Methodological Assumptions

The dimension of methodology pertains to the “knowledge of how” or “know how” (Mouton, 1996:35) in the pursuit of truthful knowledge. In this study, which is grounded in phenomenology, the methodology employed is observation and semi-structured individual interviews. The central objective of phenomenology was to explore, understand and describe the lived experiences of aggression by middle-childhood learners. In attempting to present plausible interpretations of these lived experiences the researcher bracketed any preconceived notions (Lichtman, 2010:17) and biases that she had regarding the phenomenon in question in the attempt to acquire a meaningful understanding.
1.6.4 General Assumptions

A major consideration on the part of the researcher is attending to the question of the researcher’s assumptions as they relate to the research process. “What is it to be like a child? and “how does a child think and feel?” are relevant questions addressed by Greig, Taylor and Mackay (2007:89) that positions the researcher in the frame of reference that this study is middle-childhood centred, and that the study is grounded in the Intermediate Phase male learners accounts of their experiences of aggression in school.

The researcher also acknowledges that male learners in middle-childhood are at a significant phase in their development as it presents a transition between childhood and adolescence characterised by “a time of sustained attention to realistic tasks” (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:21) and as participants in the research process they were treated with respect and sensitivity.

In the quest for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of aggression as experienced by male learners in school the researcher noted that contextual factors such as age, gender, personalities, confidence and language proficiency could inhibit or enhance their contributions. The researcher noted that the research process was steered and veered from the notion of voluntary participation and keen support of the learners. In avoidance of presenting a limited interpretation of the learners’ responses which could be misattributed to their incompetence, the researcher acknowledged inexperience and immaturity of the participants (Greene & Hogan, 2005:146).

The researcher has also noted the assumption of the stereotype that boys are generally inarticulate or, as (Delfos, 2004:73) states “less linguistic” and thus carrying out semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews with them may be challenging. However, from a professional positioning in my capacity of a Foundation Phase teacher the researcher holds the belief that children are active participants in the construction and acquisition of knowledge. Furthermore, some interviews might have been difficult for some middle-childhood boys pending on the engagement between researcher as interviewer and middle-childhood learner as interviewee. Therefore, the researcher needed to establish trust with each participant.

The researcher holds the perspective that it is not entirely possible to be distanced psychologically from this qualitative research study project as an engagement with middle-childhood male learners is necessary to foster good relationships for the purpose of encouraging participation. The researcher approached this inquiry by focusing on the
perspectives of the Intermediate Phase male learners’ experiences of aggression. This end was achieved by adjusting the level of vocabulary when deemed necessary in the predetermined schedule of questions and through the use of unscheduled probes. Since gender seems to define almost every facet of a human experiences I therefore, concur with the ideas of Kaschak (1992), and Rosser (2005), in (Kahn, 2009:14), who states that one’s choices in life are “affected by the ways in which we make sense of gender.”

Having established the epistemological stance informing this research inquiry and being cognisant of the research questions and the research aims, the theoretical perspectives, research methods and the research process were described as part of the research design and method.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

1.7.1 Research Design

A research design which occurs at the “beginning of a research project” (Babbie, 2010:113) is a “plan or strategy” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:70) encompassing all the steps of the subsequent undertaking and can also be regarded as a defining feature of the research project as it provides a rationale for the investigation, and it details methods to be used for data collection and specifies the sampling process. Fink (2010) highlights the fact that a research design determines the quality of a research study. Punch (2006:48) adds that the research design positions the researcher within the research undertaken and guides how the research questions are connected to the relevant data. According to Maree and van der Westhuizen (2007:33) the research design fulfils a twofold purpose: “... it describes the procedures for conducting research and helps find answers to the research question.”

This research study was guided by a qualitative and phenomenological inquiry (Lichtman, 2010:75). This qualitative research project purposefully “describe[s] the essence of lived experiences” (Creswell, 2007:57; Lichtman, 2010:76) of Intermediate Phase male learner’s experiences of aggression typically revealed in phenomenological interviews. Furthermore, the observed patterns of behaviour were explored in relation to the masculinity perspectives and also addressed the notion of how male learners can learn to cope and manage their aggression constructively as males.

The researcher proceeded to “extract the essence from those experiences” (Lichtman, 2010:80) through a reductionist process via “bracketing, epoche [or] eidetic reduction.”
Bracketing entails suspending ones biases, judgments, thoughts and preconceived ideas about the research topic in an attempt to embrace all possible meanings attached to the phenomenon of aggression.

1.7.2 Research Method

This research was conducted in two phases:

- Phase One: Exploring and describing the essence of Intermediate Phase male learners’ experience of aggression in school.
- Phase Two: Describing guidelines that could assist male learners to cope with and manage aggression constructively.

Table 1.1 below reflects the basic strategies that were followed during the two phases of the research study.

### TABLE 1.1  COMPONENTS OF THE RESEARCH METHOD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHASES</th>
<th>COMPONENTS OF THE METHODOLOGY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Phase 1  
An exploration of male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase. | Ethical measures  
Measures to ensure trustworthiness  
Sampling  
Data collection  
- Drawings as an ice breaker  
- Phenomenological interviews (individual)  
- Recording interviews  
- Transcripts  
- Observational notes were kept  
Data analysis  
- Tesch’s open coding method  
- Literature study |


1.7.2.1 Phase One: An exploration of male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase

1.7.2.1.1 Site and social network
Forethought and attention to the choice of the location for research was imperative as Maree and van der Westhuizen (2007:34) advised that research should be conducted in terms of feasibility, access, duration, depth and suitability. Holliday (2007:33-34) suggests in the same vein that the selection of the research site which “in itself motivates the research” needs to be carefully considered against the criteria of having “boundedness, providing relevant interconnected data and sufficient richness.”

In view of this information, the researcher purposefully selected three primary schools in the district of Lenasia in the Gauteng Province. As the research topic sought to explore and describe male learners’ experiences of aggression in schools during the Intermediate Phase, a purposive sample was selected. The motivation and rationale for purposefully selecting different primary schools is that it purposefully filled the notion expressed by Holliday (2007:9) which is to “explore creative opportunity” and by doing so best helps the researcher to “understand the research problem” (Creswell, 2003:185).

1.7.2.1.2 Sampling
In an attempt to achieve data saturation and to gain rich data on the phenomenon of aggression from the lived experiences of Intermediate Phase male learners’ aggression in schools, purposive sampling was done through the assistance of the relevant gatekeepers such as the principals, parents and teachers. Purposeful sampling was organised according
to the aims of the research (Brown & Shank, 2007:124). Three learners per grade (from grade four to six within the middle-childhood age band) per school were selected. Teachers assisted in discreetly identifying learners who have experienced aggression either as a victim or a perpetrator. The learners selected for inclusion in the research study complied with the following criteria:

- Gender: Male learners from the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6) in a primary school who had experienced aggression either as a victim or perpetrator;
- Intermediate Phase male learners who agreed by written consent to participate voluntarily in the research study; and
- Male learners who had experienced aggression as a victim or perpetrator in school during the Intermediate Phase who agreed that the semi-structured one-on-one interviews could be audio-taped and transcribed.

1.8 DATA COLLECTION

In cognizance of the fact that qualitative research views data collection and data analysis as “an ongoing cyclical and iterative process” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:81), fieldwork to be conducted by the researcher relied on the primary methods of participant observation and semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological individual interviews in order to generate an in-depth understanding of Intermediate Phase male learners’ experiences of aggression in school. The interviews and participant observation occurred concurrently.

1.8.1 Field notes

Field notes are an additional method for data collection in a qualitative research study. Marshall and Rossman (2006:98) advocate that field notes pertain to the “observational record” which describes observations in a “detailed, non-judgemental and concrete” manner, whilst De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005:298) maintain that these notes should be distinctly compiled as “empirical observations and interpretations.” The field notes allowed the researcher to reflect on the research process continually. Field notes comprised notetaking of observations in relation to the participants’ behaviour, setting of research interviews including observations of the theoretical and methodological processes and researcher’s personal reflections.
1.8.1.1 Observational notes

Observation as the primary method of inquiry and data collection was the "systematic process of recording" the behavioural patterns of Intermediate Phase male learners at school without necessarily questioning the participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:83). The researcher assumed the role of participant observer fundamentally as she paid careful attention and engaged her sensory perception to gauge meaning from the "social interactions of the participants in their natural setting" (Walsh, 2001:67).

Observation, which is highly subjective, was used to complement the semi-structured one-on-one interviews as a data-collecting technique. Observation enabled the researcher to obtain critical data which was not necessarily elicited from the interviews and allowed for field notes in a journal to include the researcher’s ‘hunches’ (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b: 86).

1.8.1.2 Theoretical notes

Theoretical notes which formed part of the research process included “writing analytic memos” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:161) whereby the researcher conducted the semi-structured one-on-one interviews, bearing in mind the conceptual and theoretical framework of the research question and aims. Theoretical notes were applied by the researcher in attempts to organise and analyse the corpus of research data.

1.8.1.3 Methodological notes

These notes were made by the researcher as comments and reminders of the process of facilitating the semi-structured one-on-one interviews with participants. The methodological notes consisted of an introductory message to the participants, a reminder to obtain consent for participation and the audio-taping of the interviews from the participants themselves, as well as a note of priority questions that should be addressed.

1.8.1.4 Reflective notes

Marshall and Rossman (2006:161) advocate that reflective notes are “invaluable for generating unusual insights” when the researcher focuses on the analysis of data. Reflective notes included the researcher’s thoughts, feelings, reflections and insights for the duration of the data collection period and also include “hunches or broad ideas or themes” that may arise (Creswell, 2008:225) from the research setting.
1.8.2 Drawings
As Guillemin (2004:272) advocated that drawings are a “rich and insightful method” used as “an adjunct” to other methods, the technique of drawings (Backett-Milburn & McKie, 1999:387-398; Guillemin, 2004:272-289) was implemented only as an icebreaker to enhance the learners’ participation prior to the start of the interviews. Since Rose (2007:2) regards the visual as “representations” whose meanings maybe “implicit or explicit, conscious or unconscious,” it must be noted that the drawings were not subjected to interpretation by the researcher for data/diagnostic analysis as it was not one the aims of this study. Furthermore these images may not have reflected their lived experiences but could have merely been a representation of aggression that was acquired by means of media or literary influences.

1.8.3. Semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews
As the researcher was constantly informed by the purpose of the research, a suitable method of interviewing namely, semi-structured one-on-one interviews was used to explore in depth the participants’ experiences of aggression in school. The individual semi-structured phenomenological interview “corroborate[d] data” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:87) on the lived experiences of aggression in school which served to enhance the credibility of the findings.

The researcher facilitated a schedule of predetermined open-ended questions (Appendix F) which served as a guide for directing the interview pending on the responses of the middle-childhood male learners. In terms of gathering information, semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews were conducted with male learners from purposefully selected primary schools, about their experiences of aggression. The interviews were contextualised, as exploration lead to a wealth of data and sufficiency. The researcher posed questions about the previous years’ experiences of aggression in school to connect these to present experiences thereby obtaining a holistic picture of the participants’ lived experiences of aggression in school (see Appendix F).

1.8.3.1 Probing
The technique of probing enabled the researcher to “manage the conversation by regulating the length of the answers and degree of detail, clarifying unclear sentences or phrases, filling missing steps and keeping the conversation on the topic” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: 164). The use of probing aimed at obtaining meaningful explanations and eliciting information on the male learner’s actual firsthand experience of the phenomenon of aggression.
1.8.3.2. Process of individual semi-structured phenomenological interviews

The semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews took place after the application of the draw and writing (drawings) icebreaker activity.

1.8.3.3 Recording interview data

As De Vos et al., (2005:298) posit that using a tape recorder provides a “much fuller record than notes during an interview” the interviews with participants were audio-taped. The rationale for this is that it secured the participants exact responses, which were available for data analysis. Participant permission and assent to tape record the interview were obtained (Appendix D & E).

1.8.3.4 Transcribing data

The process of transcribing interview data was done following the conclusion of the interviews with learners. As it is an extensive task, the researcher took ownership of transcribing data as it involved “judgement [and] level of detail” (Lichtman, 2010:193).

1.9 DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher sought to make sense (Creswell, 2003:190) out of the large amount of data accrued by applying Creswell’s generic steps, which connected with the research design. In the analysis the researcher implemented Tesch’s steps in Creswell (2003:192) to reduce information on learners’ lived experiences of aggression at school, and masculinity issues into themes and categories. Data was clustered around themes that described the participants’ experiences of aggression.

In response to the question posed by Saldana (2009:15), “What gets coded?” the researcher recorded learners’ responses on the experience of aggression in schools, relevant observations and reflections.

Table 1.2 on the following page highlights the data collection techniques, documentation, methods and data sources that were employed to collect data.
TABLE 1.2 DATA COLLECTION FRAMEWORK:

Techniques, documentation methods and data sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION METHODS</th>
<th>DATA SOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Field notes</td>
<td>Taking observational notes</td>
<td>Observational notes after each interview. Reflective diary. Personal experiences during actual research sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- observational</td>
<td>Researcher’s Journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- theoretical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- methodological</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- reflective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews</td>
<td>Audio recordings.</td>
<td>Rich data from the interviews with participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Member checking</td>
<td>Taped interviews.</td>
<td>Transcripts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.10 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

An important issue that was given definite consideration whilst the data was collected and coherently organised was the “rigor within and the credentials” of the research inquiry (Morse, Swanson & Kuzel, 2001:89). To ensure and assess the quality and integrity of the research project, Krefting’s (1991) descriptions of Guba’s (1981) model for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research was delineated as four relevant criteria which were important for enhancing the rigour of the research study. The criteria of truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality (Krefting, 1991:214–215) were applied by means of the following strategies: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The application of these criteria is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, Section 3.4.
1.11 COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

In attempting to obtain Intermediate Phase male learners’ on their experience of aggression, the researcher was obligated to employ an ethical code and approach applicable to the entire research process. Since the participants are in the role of contributors, their physical, cognitive and emotional wellbeing were of significant concern to the researcher. To this extent the researcher adhered to ethical principles which are “empirical and theoretical and permeate the research process” (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2008:5) in order to maintain the participants’ rights in terms of their “welfare, protection, provision, choice and participation” (Greene & Hogan, 2005:81). A detailed description for this qualitative research study’s ethical measures is provided in Chapter Three, Section 3.5.

1.12 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Important aspects within the framework of this research study required an interpretation and explanation. For the purpose of this study, the researcher clarified the relevant and important key concepts.

- Intermediate Phase
  The General Education and Training Band (GET) is subdivided into three conceptual phases. The three phases correspond to the developmental phases that the children go through. The Intermediate Phase is the second phase within the GET band. It pertains to the teaching and learning of grades 4 to 6. Learners in the Intermediate Phase “... begin to understand detailed relationships between people, materials, incidents, circumstances and are able to interpret the consequences of such relationships” (Gultig, Lubisi, Parker & Wedekind, 1998:16).

- Middle-childhood
  Middle childhood is the developmental stage between early childhood “... that is the time when milk teeth are shed and the onset of adolescence” (Engelbrecht & Green, 2001:79). Children at this stage range approximately from the ages of 6 to 12 (Louw & Louw, 2007:6). Middle-childhood learners at this age develop a sense of self and find it important to gain social acceptance and to experience achievement. For the purpose of this study, 9 to 11 year old learners will be referred to as middle-childhood learners.
• Male
Male relates to biological sex (Skelton, Francis & Smulyan, 2006:12). In addition (Dictionary.com: online 2010) refers to male as adjectives that describe men and boys' attributes and conduct, culturally ascribed to them. In the context of this study male refers specifically to the middle-childhood boys with characteristics ideally associated with being a man or a boy.

• Masculinity
Masculinity is a set of social practices and cultural representations associated with being a man (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004:82). Masculinity traits differ geographically, culturally, historically as well as from one society to the next. The term male has been replaced with masculinity relating to the discussion of gender in human behaviour (Skelton et al., 2006:22). Kahn (2009:2) regards masculinity as “the social, behavioural, emotional, expressive-laden experiences of men and characteristics” attributed to men. Masculinity therefore embodies a middle-child male learner’s traits, characteristics and temperament acquired from his social and cultural interactions for his identification as male.

• Learners
According to the South African Schools Act, 1996 (No.84 of 1996:2), a learner is “any person receiving education or obliged to receive education in terms of this act.” The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1995) defines a learner as a person who is learning a subject or a skill. For the purpose of this study, learners will be described as grade 4 to 6 male individuals in the Intermediate Phase who interact with other individuals in their learning environment.

• Experience
Experiences are defined in the The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1995) as “an actual observation or a practical acquaintance with facts or events, knowledge or skill resulting from this and an event regarded as affecting one (unpleasant experience).” Green and Hogan (2005:4) define experience as the fact of being consciously the subject of a condition or of being consciously affected by an event. Alternatively, Grobler and Schenck (2009:142) proposed that an experience could be unconscious or conscious dependent on how an individual perceives the experience to fit into his/her psyche. For the purpose of this study, experience pertains to the Intermediate Phase male learners' conscious or unconscious state of being subjected to the condition of aggression or the effects of aggression which they either own or reject. This experience embodies all of the actual observations, personal
knowledge and involvement in aggression and aggressive behaviours. As experience is interpretive, the learners’ experiences of aggression were interpreted by the means of observation and semi-structured one-on-one interviews.

- Aggression
Aggression is any form of behaviour that is intended to injure someone physically or psychologically (Berkowitz, 1993:3). It can also be defined as the “delivery of a noxious stimulus” from one person to the next, with the intent to harm, when the other person is motivated to avoid the stimulus (Geen, 2001:3). The “intent” is goal directed at achieving injury (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Berkowitz, 1993; Fiske, 2010; Geen, 2001). Thus, aggression will be regarded as any behaviour embracing the intention to physically, verbally and psychologically hurt another individual.

- School
According to the South African Schools Act, 1996 (No. 84 of 1996:3), school means a “public school or an independent school which enrols learners in one or more grades between grade R and grade 12.” A school is an institution for teaching and learning, an establishment for education and a process of formal training and instruction (Dictionary. Com: online 2010). The school thus embodies the environment of all formal teaching and learning activities and includes extra and co-curricular activities in which the learner interacts and engages in to gain knowledge, skills and competence. School also encompasses a “major formative experience affecting every aspect of development” (Papalia et al., 2010:366).

1.13 LITERATURE CONTROL

The research study of male learners’ experience of aggression in school is situated within a conceptual and theoretical framework that defines and delineates a number of relevant, key concepts and theories as identified by the researcher. Subsequently a literature control was applied after data collection and analysis to examine the findings of the research study in relation to theoretical and literature advocacy as well as to similar studies.
1.13.1 Phase 2: Description of guidelines to assist Intermediate Phase male learners to cope with and manage aggression constructively in school

A literature study was conducted upon conclusion of the analysis of data in the research study after which the researcher described guidelines in phase two. These guidelines will equip Intermediate Phase male learners with skills to cope with and manage aggression constructively in school.

1.14 COMPOSITION OF INQUIRY (CHAPTER DIVISION)

The following chapters inform the reader of the background and rationale, research aims, purpose of research and the research method. In addition it elaborates on the conceptual framework, outlines the research design and methodology, and describes data analysis and details of the findings.

Chapter 1: Rationale and Overview

Chapter 2: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Description of the Findings: male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Guidelines, Recommendations and Limitations
1.15 SUMMARY

Chapter One provided the background information and rationale for the purpose for this study. The research questions and research aims have been implicitly stated whilst the research design and methodology specified the procedures for sampling, data collection and data analysis. Key concepts used in the study have been clarified.

Chapter Two provides a conceptual framework that relates to stages of middle-childhood development, various theoretical perspectives of aggression and theoretical underpinnings of masculinity studies and the findings of other scientific research studies relevant to this study. Illustrations and explanations in the conceptual framework serve to inform and consolidate the research topic of “Male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase.”
CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Delfos (2004:11) maintains that conduct denotes behaviour towards something or someone and that behaviour contains a moral dimension. The term aggression thus draws its connotation from this classification to specific behavioural problems amongst children which manifest as theft, threats, bullying, injury and violent assaults. Attention is drawn to the fact that these social phenomena maybe manifesting in the school environment as verbal, physical and psychological problems amongst learners. Normal childhood misdemeanours like talking out of turn, being disruptive or taking things without asking permission seems no longer the norm. These behavioural difficulties are of importance as they impact negatively on the development of the learners, hamper successful teaching and learning and contribute to the cycle of aggression, “maladjustment, and academic and social behaviour” (Kauffman, Mostert, Trent, & Hallahan, 1998:14). Since a national survey of violence in schools reported that about 1.8 million of all learners in South African schools between grade 3 and grade 12 (15.3%) had been exposed to violence in one form or another (Van Wyk, 2008) it becomes imperative to explore and describe these behaviours firstly from a theoretical framework.

As Intermediate Phase male learners’ experiences of aggression in school forms the premise of this research study; the purpose of this chapter is to address the phenomenon of aggression by firstly providing a description of middle-childhood learners developmental stages and, secondly to focus on the core phenomenon of aggression from the theoretical perspectives. Thirdly it will also reflect on how middle-childhood aggressive behaviours are positioned in relation to masculinity perspectives and finally review empirical research conducted on varying aspects of aggression and masculinity.

2.2 THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE INTERRELATED COMPONENTS OF AGGRESSION

By way of illustration Diagram 2.1 depicts the conceptual framework of how Intermediate Phase male learners’ experiences of aggression were explored, described and categorised.
Being concerned about the learners’ experiences of aggression raises basic questions of what, how and the why of the phenomenon of aggression. One cannot be simplistic and accept basic assumptions that factors such as unemployment, low socio-economic factors, interracial conflict, and lack of educational resources, poor discipline, crime or deteriorating social factors, amongst others, are significant attributable causes to the male learners’ behaviour (Bezuidenhout, 2003:6). Thus the line of reasoning requires a holistic expose of mitigating factors on the propensity of aggression as experienced by the middle-childhood male learner. Therefore it was incumbent on the researcher to present Diagram 2.1 above, identifying and categorizing the central, relevant and related concepts of middle-childhood stages of development, theoretical constructs of aggression and contemporary masculinities.
pertaining to the research question.

The researcher’s intention by way of Diagram 2.1 above is not to differentiate between the predominance of a specific concept but to map a conceptual framework for the study of Intermediate Phase male learners’ experiences of aggression in school. Thus, the diagram illustrates the interrelatedness of the stages of development, the phenomenon of aggression and the masculinity constructs, which are separate but inextricably connected entities to male learners’ experience of aggression. These three components work internally and externally propelling middle-childhood male learners towards or against aggressive tendencies.

If anyone of these components is compromised, a domino effect is experienced by the other two components. The coordinating concept is of course the phenomenon of aggression as experienced by middle-childhood learners. The social environment (family, friends, television, media and neighbourhood) of a middle-childhood male learner and his biological inheritance (genes, emotional and cognitive aspects) of aggressive tendencies also form part of this diagram as these two overarching components influence middle-childhood learners’ development and masculinities. Furthermore, these two components, also known as nature versus nurture (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:5), jointly interact to influence the formation and conformation of aggressive behaviours.

Support for this explanation is adapted from Delfos (2004:12) who advocates that a conduct disorder is nurtured and maintained by predisposition, whilst the conduct problem is nurtured by the effect of the environment. For the purpose of clarity the effects of predisposition and the social environment will be visible threads throughout the discussion within the conceptual framework. Taking cognizance of these components will assist in understanding the origins of an aggressive misconduct and thereby allows for the provision of suitable resolve.

2.3 STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT OF MIDDLE-CHILDHOOD

With Intermediate Phase male learners as the focussed participants of this study it is incumbent to gain an understanding of middle-childhood development. As children develop through various physical, cognitive and socio-emotional stages, it is essential to explain some of these interdependent processes and its developmental characteristics in terms of its implications for aggressive behaviour in middle-childhood. Since development is defined by
Papalia, Sterns, Feldman and Camp (2007:4) as a “systematic process of adaptive change in behaviour in one or more directions” the key areas for discussion of middle-childhood development are presented as follows.

2.3.1 Cognitive Development

Middle-childhood learners fall into the concrete operational stage (7 to 11 years) according to Piaget’s (1953) process of cognitive development (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2006:55) and is characterised by less egocentrism and increased logical deductive reasoning whilst understanding is still limited to the concrete, that is “here and now” (Papalia et al., 2010:380). Self-talk, a cognitive tool, enables children to regulate their behaviour when faced with challenging tasks. Children’s self-talk transforms into inner speech with maturity (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:212). This implies that children talk to themselves mentally. According to Vygotsky (1978), meaning is constructed intentionally via the process of mediation through the social interactions (Donald et al., 2006:57-61). Scaffolding, guided participation and cognitive apprenticeship (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:217-218) are approaches in which support and guidance are given to a child by an adult to acquire success and competency in various skills and tasks. Invariably, if content of the mediation is not represented appropriately, there are implications for the psychological wellbeing of the learner.

2.3.2 Psychosocial Development

Erikson’s psychosocial theory in (Papalia et al., 2010:385) describes the period of industry versus inferiority where industry encompasses expanding social relationships, participation in sport and the development of skills and responsibilities whilst inferiority occurs as a consequence of failure. According to Engelbrecht and Green (2001:90) middle-childhood learners develop values and respect as they learn to compete or cooperate through their triumphs and losses. Perpetual failure, frustration, isolation, disappointment and stress negatively affect the child’s sense of competence, growth and self-concept. The challenge of peer acceptance and attaining competency are factors that could influence aggressive behaviour in middle-childhood male learners.

For middle-childhood learners their physical appearance, academic successes and sporting achievements play a considerable role in the development of a healthy self concept and high self-esteem within a cognitive domain. Self-esteem interacts with behaviour and as McDevitt and Ormrod (2010:462) contend, a cycle of positive/negative self-esteem is maintained
when success/failure occurs as a result of self-esteem impinging/promoting productive/unproductive behaviour. Therefore, parents and teachers play significant roles in the development of self-esteem and the self-concept by the manner in which they deal with the middle-childhood learner’s capacity for ‘industry,’ also referred to as competence.

It also worth mentioning that the need for self-esteem according to Maslow’s self-actualisation theory (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2008:343) is firstly incumbent on a person’s achievements in relation to efficiency, capability, achievement, self-confidence, strength, and independence and secondly, based on esteem bestowed by others in the form of honour, social standing, importance, dignity, appreciation and competence. Additionally an individual’s functioning at an optimal level is dependent on the fulfilment of their needs including that of self-actualisation.

2.3.3 Socio-emotional: Moral Development

Kohlberg’s (1976) theory of moral reasoning emphasizes that middle-childhood male learners’ development of moral thought processes is important in explaining and understanding behaviour categorised as aggressive (Louw & Louw, 2007:269). Kohlberg (1976) believed that cognitive development (intellect, genes) intertwined with relevant social experiences (culture, upbringing) influences moral reasoning (Louw & Louw, 2007:269). Piaget’s (1953) stages of moral development in conjunction with cognitive maturity suggest that children adjust from “rigid obedience to authority to increasing flexibility” (Papalia et al., 2010:356) A child’s ability to moralise about aggressive behaviour is dependent on his reasoning skills, which forms part of his cognitive development. Children proceed developmentally through different stages of moral development with reference to making informed choices about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. McDevitt and Ormrod (2010:520) identified three of Kohlberg’s fundamental stages of moral reasoning, which is further subdivided into sub-stages: pre-conventional level, conventional level and the post-conventional level.

Children at the pre-conventional level have not yet developed a sense of right and wrong and merely act in obedience to satisfy established norms and practices, thus satisfying their hedonistic needs. Middle-childhood children reason at the conventional level as the child conforms to norms and upholds rules in an effort to secure approval and avoid disapproval. Respecting authority and compliance with fixed rules motivate appropriate behaviour in this stage. This stage of moral reasoning is significant for middle-childhood male learners in terms of their ability to make moral judgments about rights and responsibilities in response to aggressive behaviour.
Another model for understanding the moral development of middle-childhood learners is the socio-moral development framework based on the work of Munsey (1980), Piaget (1997), Cole (1997), in (Liese, 2003:164). This framework maintains that youngsters who misbehave are on a level of low moral reasoning and their misbehaviours should not be attributed to a deficiency of morals. In summary of this framework, low level socio-moral reasoning is understood by the following motivations: high consideration for punishment but less concern for doing the right thing, doing the right or wrong thing is prioritised on self-interests and doing the right or wrong thing is impelled by the need to preserve personal relationships.

Delfos (2004:59) reiterates that a “developed moral sense needs a well-developed me-other differentiation” and is based on the principle of interest and conflict. By implication, this means that the child should have a positive self-image as well as being able to understand their behaviour in relation to others. Implicitly this means, one adjusts one’s behaviour by observing how others behave. If this differentiation is not possible then the child operates mainly with excessive egocentricity. Whilst one may argue that aggressive children have not developed morally further than the preconventional stage according to Kohlberg’s framework, one also needs to apply the motivations for low socio-moral development for the justification of aggressive behaviours (Liese, 2003).

Moral differences also exist between male and female. According to Delfos (2004:59) “empathy” is a central feature in moral development. Empathy is visible in girls who are orientated towards the moral qualities of care and cooperation whilst boys display competition and justice as their moral standards. Hence, the emergence of masculinity traits and how it is inextricably bound with moral thought in the cognitive development of the middle-childhood male becomes noticeable.

Whilst the SAHRC strongly advocates the rights of children, the moral responsibilities of this present generation of children lacks focus. A comment made in Education South Africa (2010) is that “chaos will continue if children do not accept responsibility.” Engaging in the right behaviour and being responsible for one’s actions and the rights of others promotes moral character and development. Piaget’s theory of moral development cited in Shaffer (1996:570-571) advocates that children between the ages of 6 to 10 (heteronomous stage) develop a deep respect for rules. An area of controversy is whether middle-childhood male learners’ non compliance with rules reflects deficiencies in their moral development. It stands to reason that the doing the right thing and being responsible, the essence of moral reasoning, which should be mutually exclusive, are seemingly on opposite ends of the continuum.
2.3.4 Self-reflection

Self-reflection is a fundamental part of the moral compass that enables an individual to explain, adjust and navigate one’s behaviour. Delfos (2004: 76) purports that self-reflection entails “researching” the motives for one’s behaviour or as Piaget and Vygotsky refer to it as inner speech. By implication self-reflection means expressing feelings and thoughts verbally. Inadequate self-reflection is a characteristic of aggressive behaviours. This ability depends on the function of the biological development of the corpus callosum in the left hemisphere of the brain (Delfos, 2004:75). According to Delfos (2004:75), research indicates that a difference in the size of the corpus callosum in women, explains why females are more apt and skilful in self-reflecting than men. Self-reflection will also apply to middle-childhood male learners when questions such as ‘why did you do that?’ or ‘what did you do?’ will provide responses that indicate the ability to self-reflect.

In conclusion it is evident that whilst the developmental stages provide information on the characteristic “milestones” (Papalia et al., 2010:4) that children of the same chronological ages will pass at more or less the same ages, it must be noted however that these developmental changes are not carved in stone or fixed for each individual middle-childhood learner. In addition, various environmental and biological factors will influence or thwart progress in these interdependent developmental stages. A criticism levelled against Kohlberg’s theory of moral development is the fact that gender difference was not considered, hence one cannot assume and expect that every middle-childhood male learner will operate at the preconventional stage of moral reasoning simply because of chronological age.

2.4 THE CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF AGGRESSION

Establishing a precise and empirically validated definition of the core concept of aggression, including its interrelated concepts, is necessary to fully expound the concept of aggression and to rationalise why middle-childhood males aggress. In addition, what factors contribute to male learners’ experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase? Thus a discussion of the various definitions of aggression from both the classical theorists and recent scholars were delineated in facilitating how one conceptualises male learners’ experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase.
Amidst the myriad of theoretical definitions offered by various scholars, the early classical theorists (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mower & Sears, 1939:11) contend that aggression is “an act whose goal response is injury to an organism” whilst Buss (1967:1) defines aggression as “a response that delivers noxious stimuli to another organism.” Baron and Richardson (1994:6) define aggression as any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment.” Similarly Fiske (2010:390) defines aggression as “any behaviour whose proximate (immediate) intent is to harm another person.” Berkowitz (1993) as well as Baron and Richardson (1994:6) emphasize that aggression must involve the intention to harm or injure. Whilst these definitions reflect the central element of harm or injury, one must note that injury can be non-physical as well.

The definition of aggression by Baron and Richardson (1994) offers an enterprising view of aggression as it contains three defining features at the core of its definition. The three primary features include an invisible intent or intention to harm, the occurrence of an aversive consequence and the victim’s resistance of the attack by the perpetrator (Buss, 1967: Baron & Richardson, 1994:8). Exclusion of any one of these criteria renders the act of aggression null and void. A victim’s resistance of an attack is not always possible however, especially in certain contexts where individuals are disempowered and are unable to defend themselves. Moreover, if the intent or intention is invisible then aggression must be inferred from the conditions and acts that precede and follow the aggression. In other words, if the intended aggressive act does not result in harm or injury the behaviour nevertheless is still regarded as aggression. Consequently, the definition also stipulates that harm or injury to a living being be recognized as aggressive whilst damage to inanimate objects is not viewed as aggression. Behaviours which are the result of incompetence or negligence do not qualify as intended harm or injury.

Since aggression is such a complex phenomenon, encompassing variegated definitions and issues, it would be useful to look at the subtypes of aggression as this may facilitate understanding of this behaviour.

2.4.1 Subtypes of Aggression and its Manifestations

The complex phenomenon of aggression is classified into subtypes (Connor, 2002:10). Hostile aggression also known as emotional, reactive, impulsive or affective (Berkowitz, 1993:11) and is intended primarily to cause verbal, physical and psychological harm to another individual. This form of aggression is characterised as a confrontational act of physical aggression manifesting as bullying, threatening with weapons and resisting authority.
Instrumental aggression, otherwise known as proactive, premeditated or predative (Ramirez & Andreu, 2006:276) is perpetrated for self-defence or to achieve an objective. Berkowitz (1993:11) contends that individuals who employ instrumental and emotional aggression do so to assert their power, dominance and social status. Additionally individuals who demonstrate instrumental aggression usually find aggressive behaviours as pleasurable as there are beneficial gains. Stealing, truancy and selfishness are examples of instrumental aggression. According to Fiske (2010:391), both forms of aggression initiate “social rejection” from other individuals. The difference in the intention between hostile and instrumental aggression is that the former has the core motive to harm or injure whereas the latter aims to achieve a goal. Violence is regarded as a subtype of aggression and incorporates “extreme forms of physical aggression” on another individual or object (Krahe, 2001:13).

Defensive aggression, according to Silver (2005:8), is an angry reaction to a real perceived danger and is associated with peer rejection and exposure to violence. Aggressors tend to be callous and unsympathetic and are motivated by their need for dominance and object acquisition. Emotional aggression emanating from rage and anger is described by Berkowitz (1993:26) as fuelled by the “urge to injure.”

For facilitating an understanding in conceptualizing aggression to the proposed research study, it is imperative to adopt a general definition of aggression from the definitions described. Most definitions of aggression entail the intentional act of harming another individual, from subtle to very serious forms of aggression. Aggression could also be expressed as an act of power for the purpose of self-defence or protection (Baron & Richardson, 1994:143-144). Inadvertently whatever the form and level of aggression, such behaviours are unacceptable, harmful and undesirable. Aggression is thus presented to guide this research study as behaviours that result in the intentional and the actual act of causing physical, verbal and psychological pain, harm or injury to a recipient who is motivated to avoid such treatment.

2.4.2 Factors Contributing to Aggression

According to Baron and Richardson (1994:163) aggression never occurs “in a social vacuum” but always involves words or actions of individuals or even their presence which evokes a frustration or annoyance in the perpetrator. Aggressive responses from individuals are the result of various factors.
Interrelated risk factors encompass the socio-demographic characteristics of families, parental occupation, finances, child characteristics, family relationships, family climate and neighbourhood characteristics which influence the development of aggression (Overton, 2004:15). A family that displays constant discord and maintains distant relationships negatively infuses aggressive behaviour. A study on ‘child rearing styles’ ranging from “permissive authoritarian to democratic” indicated that a causal relationship existed between various aspects of the parental discipline style and aggression (Davenport, 1998:297). This study highlights that parents serve as aggressive models through negative punitive parenting as well as through modelling non-affirmative love. A study of verbal aggressive behaviour by parents, and of psychosocial problems of children by Vissing, Strauss, Gelles and Harrop (1991:223-238), revealed that the more excessive the verbal aggression used by a parent, the greater the probability of the child manifesting physical aggression, delinquency or interpersonal challenges.

A number of studies show that watching television violence increases the likelihood of aggressive behaviour (Wilson, 2008; Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski & Leonard, 2003; Bushman & Huesmann, 2006). Although it is a major debated issue, research consensus from the above-mentioned studies indicates that media aggression enhances the probability of aggressive behaviours if the aggression did not result in punishment and if the victim did not suffer pain. In keeping with the perspectives of the social learning theory children often emulate the aggressive behaviours of media characters that they admire and hero worship. Individuals who are habitually aggressive are influenced by media aggression. Aggressive responses emanating from aggressive scripts as a result of exposure to media violence manifests as imitative aggression that is a copycat re-enactment or as an inducement to other aggressive behaviours (Fiske, 2010:407). The above-mentioned studies reveal a correlation between children who are exposed to substantial amounts of media violence at an elementary level and the manifestation of aggressive behaviours two decades later. Krahe (2001:116) maintains that the link between aggression and media violence is perpetuated through the acquisition of scripts via the following processes: “an increase in the autonomic arousal”, similar to the excitation transfer theory, “priming of aggressive thoughts and feelings”, “acquisition of new aggressive responses”, “weakening restraints against aggression”, “desensitisation to the suffering of victims” and finally “shaping the viewers perception of the world as a violent place.” Bushman and Huesmann (2006:348) concluded in their study that the long-term effects of violent media for children occurs as a result of children acquiring scripts for aggressive behaviour through repeated observational learning.

Provocation whether actual or perceived can be verbal or physical and often results in “blow for blow” and “assault for assault” (Baron & Richardson, 1994:163). Retaliatory aggression,
response to provocation, is depicitive of revenge, counter-attacks and a repayment of injury for injury and insult for insult. According to Baron and Richardson (1994:142) retaliatory aggression provides the impetus for the escalation of aggressive behaviours and hence perpetuates an interactive pattern between verbal and physical aggression. Defensive aggression, also a form of retaliation, is a premeditated response to aggression whereby a person wants to protect himself against the onslaught of the attacker and therefore employs instrumental aggression to achieve his aim of revenge. Another example is that perceived provocation, also known as hostile attributional bias, is the result of people misinterpreting the intentions of others, including ambiguous behaviours as aggressive (Fiske, 2010:412). Whilst provocation may influence aggressive behaviours, it is also important to consider the fact that there are individuals who restrain themselves when provoked.

Frustration, which is the blocking of goal-directed behaviour, also elicits aggressive tendencies based on the intensity of the frustration, in association with aggressive cues such as anger arousal and when an occurrence produces a negative effect, such as anger (Fiske, 2010:415).

People such as authority figures, peers and outsiders in the social environment can also influence aggression merely by their presence. The aggressor's anticipation of the bystander's approval spurs him/her to aggress. The influence of an authority figure can be negated by persons who defy obedience and bystanders can promote or help to ameliorate aggression (Baron & Richardson, 1994:160-161). Bystanders define the options for an aggressive incident: reinforcing perhaps supporting, defending or simply not doing anything is known as the bystander effect. The bystander effect can vary in size, function and character and also influence the perpetrator/target behaviour. The following roles adopted by bystanders significantly influence the mental processes of the aggressor:

- manipulation
- inciting
- manipulation
- inciting
- followers
- sticking up for someone
- defending
- consoling a victim
- doing nothing to prevent an aggressive encounter

(Lewis, Kellert, Robinson, Fraser & Ping, 2004: 44)
The development of aggressive behaviours can also be tracked by means of insights and explanations offered by various theoretical perspectives.

2.5 THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF AGGRESSION

Aggressive behaviour and incidents of aggression have persistently occupied coverage in the media (see Chapter 1). In addressing the pertinent question of why perpetrators aggress requires an explanation on whether these incidents are the result of predisposition or the result of environmental influences.

Existing documented theories classified into biological and psychological constructs offer substantial explanations to the ‘why’ of aggression (Fiske, 2010). According to Krahe (2001:27) the theoretical models of aggression attempts to answer two relevant questions:

- Is aggression an innate quality of human nature?
- Is there a chance for aggression to be pre-empted or controlled?

Although some of these theories, like the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Dollard et al., 1939) are essentially early classical, it warrants mentioning as its research contributions have been the initial building blocks for understanding aggression. The following Diagram 2.2 illustrates the theoretical constructs of aggression.

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**Diagram 2.2 Theoretical constructs of aggression**
2.5.1 Biological Explanations

The fundamental assumption and premise of the biological theories is that aggression is naturally and intrinsically inherent in the biological composition of the individual person rather than the product of a person’s psychological processes (Krahe, 2001:28).

2.5.1.1 Ethology

Lorenz’s (1964) model of aggression resulted from an ethological study on the development of aggressive energy inherent in animals (Mynhardt, 2009:95). An exception to aforementioned theory which suggests that aggression has a biological cause is that two important inversely related factors (Krahe, 2001:29), namely the amount of aggression within the person and the characteristics of the external stimuli determine the manifestation of the aggressive energy.

The principles of this theory were adapted to that of humans. Contrary to Lorenz’s (1964) theorizing which maintains that aggressive energy must be replenished once released, critics’ advocate that aggressive energy can be instantly replenished with another reserve of aggressive energy as it is possible for humans to manifest aggressive acts repeatedly.

An important assumption of this theory is that aggressive energy can be kept in check and channelled in socially acceptable ways such as playing sport.

2.5.1.2 Behaviour Genetics

Proponents of the Behaviour Genetics Theory proposed that aggressive inclinations are part of a person’s genes. The significance of this theory is that the child’s internal and external characteristics are determined by the genes which may predispose them to aggressive tendencies. Behaviour geneticists conclude that environmental factors combine with genetic factors to determine whether the propensity to aggress may or may not be encouraged (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:119; Krahe, 2001:33).

There is slight evidence for the relationship between sex chromosomes and aggression whilst high levels of the testosterone hormone could be accountable for differences in gender aggressive tendencies (Baron & Richardson, 1994:258). The link between arousal and aggression, which is dualistic, is informed by a number of theories, for example the excitation transfer theory which suggests that the central nervous system kicks into gear when an individual reacts to aggression (Fiske, 2010:414; Mynhardt, 2009:96). Arousal increases aggressive tendencies when a person is provoked and aggression may reduce arousal depending on the person’s response to the provocation. In addition the excitation
transfer theory maintains that arousal produced in one situation may linger within a person affecting the emotions which then are transferred into another aggressive incident. Displaced aggression could be the result of arousal that is misattributed (Fiske, 2010:416).

2.5.2 Psychological Explanations

Psychological explanations offer various theoretical approaches to the explanations of aggressive behaviour from a psychological stance. The main ideas of some of the relevant approaches are summarized below. Krahe (2001:27) mentions that each of these approaches complements one as it relates to aggression.

2.5.2.1 Psychoanalytical Instinct Theory

Freud’s profound Psychoanalytical Instinct Theory of aggression suggested that aggressive behaviour was largely innate and caused by an “innate self-directed death instinct” (Baron & Richardson, 1994:37) which is in conflict with the “life instinct” and that repressed feelings could be released through catharsis. This theory suggested that a person’s behaviour is usually the result between a conflict of the drives and reality. An individual’s personality consists of an "id, ego and superego which function on three levels of consciousness" (Meyer et al., 2008:53). The ego provides satisfaction for the id drive in relation to the reality principle and the moral compass of the superego.

This explanation is no longer accepted as a succinct explanation for aggression (Meyer et al., 2008:85), however many concepts used in psychology at present evolved from Freud’s theory.

In keeping with the discussion of Freud’s development of the ego, Loevinger (1990), cited in Delfos (2004:57) developed a model with reference to the development of the ego. This model consisted of nine stages which develop progressively with increased insight. Some of the stages worth mentioning are: the first stage the pre-social stage, characterising an absence of socially regulated behaviour: the second stage, known as the impulsive stage, demands an immediate satisfaction of needs and wants, and the ninth stage, as the integrative stage, where there is understanding and responsibility.
2.5.2.2 Cognitive Neo-Association Theory

Berkowitz’s (1993) model of Cognitive Neo-association Theory provides an explanation as to the why people aggress (Fiske, 2010:409). Associations in the memory can trigger feelings that provoke the propensity to aggress. Aversive circumstances ranging from frustration with noise, varying temperature levels, odours, and pollutants result in unpleasant feelings of frustration, anger, pain and discomfort. This negative state evokes cognitive responses and impulsive behaviours (Kassin, Fein & Markus, 2008:411). “Fight or flight” (Fiske, 2010:403) responses are then evoked mainly with boys whilst a tend-be-friend relationship occurs with females. Concurrently situational cues influence emotional reactions to the unpleasant event. Emotions of anger, envy, anxiety, hurt, sadness and depression are internalised and through further cognitive processing a person builds a repertoire of feelings and memories wherein an activation of any one of those categories of feelings in the memory association can trigger aggressive behaviour in a new situation (Krahe, 2001:37).

Gender difference in aggression lends itself to the conclusions of this theory as women tend to defer or distract themselves from angry thoughts whereas men tend to act in response to their angry thoughts (Fiske, 2010:410; Kassin et al., 2008:411).

2.5.2.3 Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis

The Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis suggests that aggression is the result of an external stimulus providing the impetus for aggression (Baron & Richardson, 1994:37). The Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis proposed by Dollard held the basic assumption that aggression is always a consequence of frustration (Fiske, 2010:415). Subsequently this claim has been refuted, as factors such as tension and stress intertwined with frustration can initiate aggression. In most instances frustration induces anger which produces aggressive tendencies.

2.5.2.4 Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory provides a well-documented theoretical perspective that children acquire aggressive behaviours through operant conditioning, observation and modelling within social contexts. These behaviours are maintained through reinforcement or punishment (Baron & Richardson, 1994:38). Fiske (2010:405-406) refers to this as imitative aggression and maintains that this theory essentially teaches “how to aggress and when to aggress.” An explanation by Potegal and Knutson (1994:25) adds impetus to this point by
stating that children who had previously been involved in conflicts would prevent another child taking an object through extending the “duration and intensity” of this dispute simply based on reinforcement and frustration.

The Social Learning Theory has reputedly made its mark in the development of behaviour. Whilst the preceding studies have shown how biological and social influences can contribute to aggressive behaviour, these theories however do not show consensus on the development and causes of aggressive behaviour (Krahe, 2001:5).

Amidst the plethora of experimental studies of research conducted nationally and internationally investigating children and aggression, most studies have placed a high priority on the pre-developmental ages of aggression and to a moderate extent on adolescents’ aggression. Research into male middle-childhood aggression is relatively scarce, as aggression is believed to be a natural phenomenon mainly characterising early childhood behaviour and eventually disappearing from middle-childhood and adolescent periods. Although most previous studies on aggression focused on boys, to date research in South Africa has not examined male learners’ experiences of aggression in schools during the Intermediate Phase. According to Shefer et al., (2007:3) national and international studies on boys and men “remain relatively marginal.” Therefore, it is imperative to gain insight into the theoretical framework of masculinity studies to ascertain gender differences in male learners’ experiences of aggression in schools during the Intermediate Phase.

2.6 A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF MASCULINITY PERSPECTIVE

Neuman (2007:44) advocates that a theory “frames” how we think about a topic. The point of departure thus, from the outset, is the concept and definition of masculinity from traditional theoretical perspectives, which will be particularly interesting in understanding aggressive behaviour in middle-childhood male learners. Analysing middle-childhood male learners’ experiences of aggression requires an explication based on the masculinity studies, the contemporary work on gender and education as well as the theoretical relevance of masculinity approaches.

The Women’s Liberation Movement challenged inequality in gender relations which was traditionally characterised by men’s privileges of power, authority, economic resources and subordination. Men subscribed to a form of hegemonic masculinity as they subordinated women and “reinforced male privilege” (Khan, 2009:32). Challenging this inequality resulted
in a culture of violence. Men intimidated and verbally and physically assaulted women as a result of this privilege of power. Furthermore as men occupied positions of status and hierarchy in the state and business enterprises they engaged in competition, weaponry and rivalry. Despite two decades of addressing and redressing socially gendered inequalities and concerns which may possibly have influenced men’s traditional thinking and practices of masculinity, a study on male soldiers construction of masculinity reveals that masculinity within a military context is still a representation of “war heroes” as it embodies characteristics of warfare and is “gendered and sexed as a man” (Mankayi, 2010:592).

2.6.1 Gender (Masculinity)

In understanding masculinity and its influence on aggression it is necessary to explore the definitions offered by scholars on masculinity. Connell (2006: 20) states that a single form of masculinity is non-existent as masculinity is constructed differently across cultures and through the history of time. Thus multiple understandings and constructions of masculinities have emerged as acknowledged in literature (Connell, 2006; Shefer et al., 2007; Kahn, 2009; Frosh et al., 2002; Franklin, 1984). Even though masculinity has been consistently changing it is essential to consider that the early traditional meaning of masculinity esteemed traits that were stereotyped as “aggressive; independent; unemotional; dominant; active; competitive; adventurous; direct; and ambitious” (Franklin, 1984:5), whilst exercising a “power advantage” in relation to females. The multiplicities of masculinities are hierarchical and relational in nature, positioned from dominant to marginal and “subject to change” (Connell, 2002:21; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:835). Various models such as the psychoanalytic, behavioural, evolutionary and social constructionist offer explanations on how masculinity is acquired and developed (Kahn, 2009:163). Mankayi (2010:591) advocates that social contractionism is valuable in understanding men’s positioning in masculinities.

The aforementioned exploration of the origin and explanations of masculinity extends to include several definitions of masculinity which may contribute to our understanding of male learners’ aggression and masculinity. The definition offered by Lindegger and Maxwell (2007:95), that masculinity is a “system of beliefs and performances which regulate behaviour” and that of Kimmel (1996 153) which describes masculinity as “representations” reflecting the expected roles and limits of gender identification, basically advocates that masculinity is socially constructed rather than being biologically engineered. Kahn (2009:2) regards masculinity as the “complex cognitive, behavioural, emotional, expressive, psychosocial and socio-cultural experience” of men.
Both definitions seem to suggest that the social cultural experiences contribute to a man’s conceptualisation of masculinity which could be socially learnt as in Sex-Role Socialisation Theory, or socially constructed as described in feminist post-structuralist theory (MacNaughton, 2006:127).

2.6.2 Gender differences in aggressive behaviour

“No words but action,” a sentiment echoed by Delfos (2004:67) is attributed to the description of boy’s behaviour. Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1998:253) noted that gender differences in aggressive behaviour in the developmental stages from infancy to adolescence, and that boys exhibited higher levels of aggression than girls from preschool levels up to middle childhood. Support for the conclusion that males are more physically aggressive than females are the result of biological causes and through the socialisation of action readiness (Delfos, 2004:83). Krahe (2001:61) maintains that there are no definite and absolute conclusive explanations which can be attributed to gender differences in aggression as researchers are yet to provide compelling evidence. However three kinds of explanations have been suggested for the occurrences of these differences in aggressive behaviour.

2.6.2.1 The Bio-Social Theory

The Bio-Social Theory (Shaffer, 1996:519) which proposed biological and social influences on the formation of gender roles proffered evidence to support the hypothesis that males are presumed to be more aggressive than females on the basis of the testosterone-aggression link. Consequently high testosterone levels are the result of stress or conflict as researched by Dabbs (1992). Subsequently the ages of three to four and 11 to 13 evidences observable and notable increases of testosterone. Psychological processes are determined by hormone development and alerts individuals to flight or flee in situations of danger (Delfos, 2004:65). Similarly aggressive behaviours are connected to higher levels of testosterone. Delfos (2004) amply describes this testosterone aggression link as “more testosterone - more action – more aggression.” Testosterone has consequences for the physical and psychological conditions of an individual and it also affects the emotional domain and intelligence of the child (Delfos, 2004:65). In addition Archer (1991) offers the explanation that high testosterone levels, woven with social stimuli, determine aggression.
2.6.2.2 The Social Role Model

A compatible explanation for understanding gender differences in aggressive behaviour is offered by the Social Role Model. Males acquire aggressive masculine gender roles and norms through the process of socialization (Kassin et al., 2008:403). Social behaviour is constituted through social conventions and role conformities. The Social Learning theorists posited that reinforcement and observational learning contribute to the children’s formation of gender identities, sex roles and sex-typed behaviours (Shaffer, 1996:525). Parents are prominently responsible for encouraging sex typing and traditional gender roles through sex-appropriate play as girls “gravitate to homemaking activities” (MacNaughton, 2006:129) and boys play with resources that resonates with weaponry, assertiveness and toughness.

2.6.2.3 Gender Schema Theory

Advocates of the Gender Schema Theory maintain that children with basic gender identities intrinsically classify information relevant to boys and girls (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:454). Society, parents, role models, media, literature directly and indirectly reinforce aggression in males. Franklin (1984:51) contends, “Male violence is not an innate propensity but rather a function of society teaching young males what it is to be a man.” He reiterates further that young males are not taught to be violent and neither are they taught to avoid that type of behaviour. Berkowitz (1993:395) states that boys are affirmed for using aggression to “defend their rights or to correct wrongs.”

Contrarily, girls are admonished for aggressive behaviour. Compliance to these socially structured traits, roles and conventions obviously predisposed male children to show that they are the stronger sex invariably. The biosocial, social cognitive, cognitive developmental and gender schemas theories have made impressionable contributions to one’s understanding of how children acquire gender identities.

2.6.2.4 The Evolutionary or Socio-biological Theory

This perspective contrasts the social role model as it claims that men display aggression in demonstration of their power and status. A threat to this status-quo is most likely to evoke aggressive tendencies. Status is maintained by the demonstration of aggression which amply describes the “action-readiness” of the male sex in response to threat and danger (Delfos, 2004:73).
2.6.2.5 Hegemonic Masculinity

Amongst the diverse forms of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity sets the standard for being a “real man or boy” (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997:208). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:832) assert that hegemonic masculinity does not advocate violence but could be “supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through cultures, institutions, and persuasion.” Additionally it must be noted that hegemonic masculinity does not subscribe to violent aggressive behaviour but also encompasses positive traits providing financially and materially and emotionally for one’s family. Dominance, status, influence and authority characterize this type of masculinity. Assertive behaviour converts to aggression and physical strength and is represented as toughness. Hegemonic masculinity is visible in schools today when boys admire highly influential boys for their achievements. It also subtly encompasses the threat of violence and separates itself from physical weakness, emotions, dependency and co-operation.

As Gardiner (2002:4) contends that hegemonic masculinity is the reigning paradigm of masculinity studies, it is important for the researcher to distance herself from feminization as well as from accepting the traditional view of masculinity as the “oppressor/oppressed dominant model” (Gardiner, 2002:152) when focusing on the Intermediate Phase male learners experience of aggression. The discussions above provide evidence that masculinity and gender are important lenses through which one gains an understanding of middle-childhood male aggression. Essentially, this synopsis would assist in contextualizing male learners’ experiences of aggression and help determine to what extent, if any, the Intermediate Phase male learners’ masculinity influences their experiences of aggression.

2.7 AN OVERVIEW OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON AGGRESSION INCLUDING SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOLARSHIP ON MASCULINITY

Arunima and Gupta’s (1994) mixed method study of aggression and non-aggression in 6 to 8 year old children yielded results that culminated with their hypothesis that more boys are aggressive than girls. Myburgh and Poggenpoel’s (2009) meta-synthesis on learners’ experiences of aggression in secondary schools (Botha, 2006; Geyer, 2007; Mosia, 2004; Musekene, 2005; Jacobs, 2006; Moosa, 2008; Naicker, 2009; Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007; Prins, 2009; Schoeman, 2004; Snyman, 2006) reached a consensus that aggression is a common and frequent experience amongst adolescents. The lived experiences of aggression by the learners revealed that aggression affected their mental health.
Whilst the studies on hegemonic masculinities and gender add to our existing knowledge of the theoretical construct of masculinity, it also contributes new academic insights on men's/boys experiences of masculinity. Ampofo and Boateng's (2007:70-71) investigation of how hegemonic masculinities structure gender relations in Ghana evidenced differences in the extent to which boys exhibited hegemonic masculinity and that masculinity develops through stages. In the context of the findings it was also recommended that masculinity and gender roles should be incorporated in the existing education curricula (Ampofo & Boateng, 2007:70-71).

The findings of Lindegger and Maxwell (2007:109) revealed that boys were pressurised to conform to standards of masculinity and that there were contrasting feelings of “complicity and resistance” to conforming. De Wet’s (2007) study evidenced amongst others that gender inequality was one of the factors for school violence in Lesotho. Interestingly patriarchy and male domination characterised the Basotho culture and hence violence was an expression of masculinity exhibited by male learners (De Wet, 2007).

In Mankayi’s (2010:591) study a social or institutionalised form of masculinity may incorporate “gender power inequalities” which may “intersect” with an individual’s conceptualisation of masculinity, their negotiation of sexuality and violent behaviour. Similarly exploring and describing male learners’ experience of aggression and male learners positioning in masculinity could add insight into the effects of masculinity on aggressive behaviours.

In exploring male perpetrators experiences of violence against women within a feminist-psychoanalytic and social constructivist approach Lau and Stevens (2010) found that violence was experienced as ‘being in control’ through an intimate domination of a woman and ‘losing control’ through a deliberate and intentional act of resorting to violence when a man’s anger is fuelled. Although men positioned themselves in dominant discourses of masculinity their emotional vulnerability rendered them powerless.

Whilst some of these studies focused on adolescent aggression and other studies on the construction of masculinity, its relevance throws some light on the extent and frequency of aggression by male learners as well as on the varying experiences of masculinity. Now that the connection between the development of aggressive behaviour and masculinity practices has been highlighted, the lack of studies focusing on middle-childhood experiences of aggression mirrored against the construction masculinity presents the gap, which needs to be explored and addressed.
2.8 SUMMARY

Chapter Two provided a conceptual framework referred to as the “logic undergirding” by (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:11) for establishing an understanding of the key concepts of the phenomenon of aggression, its classification and its theoretical foundations in explaining aggression. An exploration of the stages of development focusing on middle childhood was presented. An overview of masculinity perspectives was outlined, highlighting its woven thread to the history of the phenomenon of aggression and its manifestation of aggressive behaviours. Experimental studies and other research investigations corresponding to the research topic and its related components were reviewed. The intention of this conceptual and theoretical framework was to provide a solid rationale of aggression as it develops through the influence of biological and social conventions. The next chapter focuses on the research design and methodology that was implemented to guide the research exploration and understanding of Intermediate Phase male learners’ experience of aggression in school.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“There is one thing more vital to science than intelligent methods; and that is the sincere desire to find out the truth, whatever it may be” (Papalia et al., 2007: 33).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology for the purpose of guiding the researcher in executing this qualitative study. The research design and methodology employed will provide clarification on the following aspects of the research study:

- Research design: the nature and purpose of qualitative research
- Research methods
- Data-collection procedures including the process of semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews
- Data analysis
- Measures to ensure trustworthiness
- Ethical measures

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Fink (2010:63) describes a research design as pertaining to the organisation and measurement of the sample participating in the research study. The research design specifying the organisation of the participants and methodology for the achievement of the research aims must function within the periphery of rigid ethical guidelines and prescribed benchmarks, thereby striving for a quality study.
Diagram 3.1 presents the design of a qualitative framework for this study. It indicates that this qualitative study adopts a research design of phenomenological approach. Marshall and Rossman’s (2006:55) argument for motivating the use of a qualitative approach which emanates from the traditional category of focusing on “individual lived experience” provides the rationale for this strategy for inquiry as the core purpose is to accurately describe the nature of aggression as experienced by male learners in school during the Intermediate Phase. The embedded hallmarks delineating this qualitative approach include identified unique strengths of exploratory, descriptive, interpretive and contextual elements (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:55). The elements depicted in Diagram 3.1 below are discussed with the intent of positioning the purpose and the nature of this qualitative study.

**DIAGRAM 3.1 A qualitative research strategy for the exploration of male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase.**

**3.2.1 The Nature and Purpose of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is defined as “the study of people in their natural environment as it strives to understand the meaning people’s words and behaviours have for them” (Tuthy, Rothery & Grinell, 1996:4) and “makes sense of social problems” by means of exploring and discovering “meanings people bring to them” (Fink, 2010:144). Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (2000:96) describe a qualitative study as a “systematic, empirical strategy for
answering questions about people in a particular social context.” Nieuwenhuis (2007a:50-51) conceptualises qualitative research as collection of rich data on a particular phenomenon with the intention of developing an understanding of it in a natural context. It serves as a method for exploring, describing and understanding as male learners in the Intermediate Phase recount and details their experiences of aggression.

Recommendations by Creswell (2007:37-39) on the characteristics of qualitative research are summarized within the context of this study as follows:

- Data was collected in a natural environment, which is the primary school.
- Multiple methods that are interactive are used for data collection such as semi-structured interviews and observations.
- The researcher was the central figure in managing the research design and methodological processes and followed the research design as planned.
- An interpretive approach was taken towards data analysis.
- The identified phenomenon aggression was explored and described holistically from the lived experiences of Intermediate Phase male learners in schools.
- The self-reflexivity of the researcher is revealed as she acknowledged her biases, presuppositions and values which might have influenced the participants and the study.
- The researcher has employed an inductive reasoning in data analysis.
- The research focuses primarily on acquiring meaning and understanding from the rich shared information of the participants.

Apart from these characteristics, which enabled the researcher to typically ascertain the essence and nature of a qualitative study, the research question and context of the study guides the researcher’s choice (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:52) of a qualitative approach. The underlying assumptions applicable to qualitative research have been explicated in chapter one.

### 3.2.2 Phenomenological Approach

Early human science research by the likes of Edmund Husserl (1917/1918), cited in Meyer et al., (2008:330) amongst others, have inspired and guided phenomenological research design and methodology. An important feature of phenomenology is “reflective inquiry” into the “mind or consciousness” (Greene & Hogan, 2005:221). Meyer et al. (2008:330) maintain that phenomenology ‘examines the phenomena” or “manifestations” as a person sees it and
understands it. According to Moustakas (1994:26) the essence of phenomenology is “to the things themselves” which provides the “impetus for experience and for generating new knowledge.” Bearing in mind that “the individuals subjective world of perception is the starting point” (Meyer et al., 2008:33) the researcher attempted to understand middle-childhood male learners’ experiences of the phenomenon of aggression as their lived experiences. Doing research that is phenomenological in nature with middle-childhood male learners orientates towards a dependence of collecting data through the language communicated by the learners. As phenomenology is a type of qualitative research approach whose purpose is to “describe the essence of lived experiences of individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon,” Creswell (2007:57) and Lichtman (2010:76) add that the phenomenon is the starting point where the essence and meaning will be derived from.

Phenomenological principles and procedures advocated by Moustakas (1994:58) were applied in this study as:

- attending to things the way they were, that is, Intermediate Phase male learners experiences of aggression as it occurs in the natural setting in school;
- examining the phenomenon of aggression from every angle and perspective of the participants to acquire a holistic understanding;
- deriving meaning through the process of reflection and intuition which in this study entailed an interpretivist approach analysis;
- prioritizing to provide an explicit and salient description of the participants experiences of aggression;
- acquiring understanding and awakening future interest rooted in questions that provide direction; and
- being subject and object orientated in which the perspectives of the participants were connected to their actual experiences of aggression in school.

The research justified the choice of a qualitative research design with a phenomenological inquiry. The four interconnected attributes of exploration, description, interpretation and contextualisation within this qualitative strategy inquiry as depicted in Table 1.1 and Diagram 3.1 were employed to understand and explain the participants lived experiences of aggression in school.
3.2.3 Exploratory
Marshall and Rossman (1999:33) describe the purpose of qualitative research as exploratory, to investigate a phenomenon that lacks comprehensive understanding and to identify categories elucidating meaning. The phenomenon of aggression as experienced by Intermediate Phase male learners is the major focus of this study.

Whilst the core purpose of this study is exploratory, it is probable that these semi-structured phenomenological interviews can yield explanatory information on learners’ experiences of aggression (Babbie, 2010:93-94) as it builds on descriptive research by exploring the experiences of aggression.

3.2.4 Descriptive
After careful consideration on the purpose of this research study, it becomes evident that descriptive answers that are “best addressed in a natural setting using exploratory approach” are necessary (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:57). Description is concerned with constructing a picture and story of an event, a person or a condition or even a connection of these variables. Thus, as descriptive research is characterized by words and descriptions this research study called for a qualitative approach which built a worthy description of learners experiences of aggression, which is “unexplored in the literature,” as explicitly stated by Marshall and Rossman (1999:33).

3.2.5 Interpretive
Exploring and describing learners’ experiences of aggression in school required an interpretive paradigm (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a:58). Creswell (2003:182) advocates that a qualitative study is “fundamentally interpretive” as data collected will be subject to interpretation by the researcher through a process of firstly describing the phenomenon of aggression as experienced the learners. Secondly themes and categories were developed and analyzed, from which an interpretation and conclusions were deduced for its meaning. The researcher assumed a neutral stance and conducted the research with objectivity.
A defining feature of an interpretivist paradigm that embedded this qualitative research was the emphasis of human value, and acquires a deep understanding, or “Verstehen” (Ritchie & Lewis 2003:7) of a person’s experience of a particular phenomenon such as aggression. Interpretivist is also referred to as ‘naturalistic’ (Thomas, 2009:76) as the researcher will assumed the role of the human instrument who positioned herself subjectively in the natural setting to construct an understanding of the reality of aggression as constructively as possible.

The researcher as a female was aware of her gendered practices, attitudes and experiences in her communication and interactions with male learners which presented itself as a limitation. As an interpretive researcher I will strive to provide a ‘thick description’ as advised by Lichtman (2010:18) in contextualizing and interpreting middle-childhood male learners’ experience of aggression.

3.2.6 Contextual
The school environment was the ‘natural setting’ (Creswell, 2007:37) that constitutes the context in which learners experience aggression in school. Data was collected by means of semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews and observation in the context of the environment where the learners socially interact with one another. Having knowledge of a school and interview context enabled the researcher to account for the factors such as school setting, learners’ ages, gender, maturity, language proficiency and time schedules in preparation for an efficient facilitation of the data collection. This approach also aided the researcher in stating her assumptions about researching Intermediate Phase male learners. The predetermined schedule of interview questions streamlined the context of the semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews which prevented a digression into a different context.

3.3 Research Method
As the research question inevitably foreshadowed the “techniques and procedures” that were employed to “gather and analyse data” (Crotty, 2009:3) in this qualitative and phenomenological research study, the first phase of the study encompassed the exploration and description of male learners’ lived experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase.
3.3.1 Gaining Access

Through the process of identifying and selecting schools that “purposefully” (Creswell, 2007:125) fit the aims of the research study and through the strategy of purposeful sampling the researcher was able to gain access to the research site. A preliminary requirement, which must be adhered to long before the unfolding of the research process, is that the researcher must obtain consent from the relevant ‘gatekeepers’ (Creswell, 2008:219).

Accordingly, the researcher initiated the process of obtaining consent from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), the principals of the respective Primary schools, as well as consent from the parents of participants who were purposively selected prior to the execution of data collection process. The ethical concerns of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy were adhered to as described in Section 3.5 (Ethical measures). Letters requesting permission to conduct research were sent to the relevant gatekeepers: Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) (Appendix A) and North-West University. Telephone contact was made with the purposefully selected school principals to arrange a meeting to discuss the research aims and methods, thereby securing approval for conducting the research study at their schools. Permission letters were received from the principals and presented to the GDE.

3.3.2 Participant Selection

Once permission was secured from the relevant authorities, namely, the North West University, the Gauteng Department of Education and the school principals in keeping with requirements determined by them, the researcher approached the educators of the male learners in the Intermediate Phase at the various schools to request their assistance and discuss the process of identifying the learners who met with the purposive sampling criteria (Section 1.7.2.1.2) that is, male learners who had experienced aggression either as a victim or a perpetrator. The researcher met with the male learners whose parents had given individual consent to be included in the research study at their respective schools. The final sample included 27 Intermediate Phase male learners.

3.3.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured on-on-one phenomenological interviews were audio-taped with the assent of the participants. Triangulation and crystallization allowed the researcher “to maximise the validity of the findings” (Mouton, 1996:108). According to Merriam (1998:9) data collection entails the process of “asking, watching and reviewing.” At this juncture the researcher took
cognizance that qualitative research views data collection as “an ongoing cyclical and iterative process” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:81), for the purpose of achieving data saturation. The nature of the task of collecting data was undertaken through the qualitative approach of observation, semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews and triangulation with the aim of gaining a wealth of data and rich descriptions.

3.3.3.1 Observation

De Vos et al. (2005:276) offer the definition that participant observation is a “qualitative research procedure that studies the natural and everyday set-up in a particular community or situation. Observation was beneficial in the sense that it allowed the researcher to obtain critical data that may not necessarily be elicited from the interviews. Nieuwenhuis (2007:84b) advises that the researcher must define the “purpose and focus” of observation prior to using observation as a data-gathering technique. Mirrored against the information the researcher’s focus for observation was to carefully note participant interaction and gain insight into the phenomenon of participants’ through actions and interaction. Thus, the researcher paid particular attention to the verbal and non-verbal behaviours. It is also incumbent on the researcher to preserve the dignity and anonymity of the participants.

It was imperative that the researcher used her listening skills carefully to what was said, or what was implied in order to induce significant themes and events (Neuman, 2007:288). The researcher applied Neuman’s (2007:289-290) recommendations, which describe field notes in different levels. The following field notes were used: jotted notes, direct observation notes, researcher interference, analytic notes and personal notes.

3.3.3.1.1 Observation tool

Table 3.1 illustrates the observation checklist that was used by the researcher throughout the data-collection process. This tool was used to make field, theoretical and methodological notes and it prevented the researcher from being intrusive and enabled her to gather data as consistently and effectively as possible.
3.3.3.2 Semi-structured one-on-one interviews

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews, which were the primary method of data collection, were a designated method of data collection in this phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994:114). This method is described as an informal and interactive process composed of open-ended questions that could be prepared in advance. It is incumbent that the “method and phenomenon must dialogue” so that it prepares for the emergence of the phenomenon that is experienced (Moustakas, 1994:115).

The technique of drawings suggested by Backett-Milburn and McKie (1999:387-398) and Guillemin (2004:272-289) was implemented only as an icebreaker to initiate semi-structured one-to-one phenomenological interviews and discussions as Berger (1972:7) (cited in Rose, 2007:2) states that “the child looks and recognizes before it can speak.” It is hoped that the drawing activity by the participants represented the reality of aggression as lived and experienced by the participants themselves. Drawings serving as visual images open channels for communication as De Lange, Mitchell and Stuart (2006:153) convey that it “allows for communication for the physical and emotional worlds.” A story must emerge to reflect the context of the phenomenon of aggression.

Concentrating on the lived experience of aggression streamlined the interview into context. Seidman (2006:19) believes that the root of interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. The implication for the researcher is that she had to be genuinely and authentically interested in the phenomenon of aggression as experienced by male learners in school during the
Intermediate Phase. The researcher as interviewer established rapport with participants through the use of the drawings as a ice-breaker activity, allowed enough time for participants to complete the semi-structured interviews, focused on open-ended questions, was flexible in rephrasing questions, provided suitable seating arrangements, maintained a relaxed atmosphere by being inviting and by managing tone, volume and pitch of voice, facilitated discussion through probes, checked responses for reliability as suggested by Lewis and Lindsay (2000:216) and maintained sensitivity.

3.3.3.2.1 Facilitation of individual semi-structured phenomenological interviews

The researcher, as primary instrument for gathering data, facilitated the process of semi-structured one-on-one interviews with consideration, by applying the description of qualitative interviewing adopted by Lichtman (2010:139) as that of “conversation with a purpose.” With this in mind the researcher attempted to create an environment of rapport and trust for the purpose of achieving cooperation and effective participation to generate rich data.

The purpose of the research inquiry was explained to the participants so that any feelings of apprehension could be alleviated. “As visual images are invaluable in the course of interviewing” (Lewis & Lindsay 2000:144), the drawings were used as a research tool only to initiate discussions on aggression. Thereafter semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews were conducted. The researcher posed the pre-set questions as outlined in the predetermined schedule (Appendix F).

3.3.3.2.2 Interviewing Procedures

The following procedures were followed:

- In the pre-session interview the learners were introduced to the researcher, preliminary information on the aims and purpose, the process of gathering information, how information collected will be handled and the duration of the procedures.

- The ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity were discussed with the participants and the researcher requested permission for the interview to be audio taped.

- Using the learners drawing on their experience of aggression, the researcher posed predetermined questions on the phenomenon of aggression through the process of semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews.
Using probes and elaboration of techniques the researcher addressed pertinent additional questions to elicit fuller descriptions of the experience of the phenomenon of aggression. The interview session concluded with the final open-ended questions of “How did you find the interview?”

3.3.4 Data Analysis

Merriam (1998:21) posits that the researcher is the “primary instrument for gathering and analysing data.” To this extent, the researcher fulfilled the roles of managing and controlling the research process with the task of collecting, interpreting and analysing data. Morse et al. (2001:193) state that synchrony must exist between data collection and data analysis.

Data analysis is the subsequent process that follows data collection through the semi-structured one-one-one phenomenological interviews and observation whereby information collected is examined for recurring themes and meanings. The researcher took note of Creswell’s (2003:191) generic steps, which connected with the research design. The following steps were used in this study to analyse the data:

3.3.4.1 Themes and coding

- **Step one**: Organise and prepare data for analysis (Transcriptions by researcher and independent coder are safeguarded in a folder labeled the Researcher Journal. Data files are stored on an external hard drive)
- **Step two**: Obtain a sense of the data and reflect on meaning
- **Step three**: Begin the process of coding the data and text into meaningful chunks. The researcher will generate codes organise and categorise the information (Miles & Huberman, 1994:65)
- **Step four**: Provide a detailed description of information about the male learners in school during the Intermediate Phase, events and places, experiences
- **Step five**: Represent the description chronologically using visuals, tables, figures or illustrations
- **Step six**: Interpret and attach meaning to the data.

In the analysis stage, the researcher implemented Tesch’s steps, as in Creswell (2003:192) to reduce information on male learners’ lived experiences of aggression in school and masculinity issues into themes and categories. These steps assisted the researcher to analyze textual data systematically:
• The researcher read the interview transcriptions of the male learners’ experiences of aggression in school carefully, and clustered similar topics whilst arranging them into columns.
• Topics were abbreviated as codes.
• Suitable descriptions were allocated to topics, which were then categorised.
• Codes were alphabetized.
• Related topics were grouped together and if necessary the researcher recoded data.

In response to the question posed by Saldana (2009:15), “What gets coded?” the researcher recorded male learners’ responses on the experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase, relevant observations and reflections. Miles and Huberman’s (1994:65) advice that since coding is an exhaustive task the researcher should strive to code the previous set of field notes before the next visit to the research site and that a list of codes be designed prior to beginning the research study was implemented. The process of coding for this research required the assistance of independent coders who were knowledgeable about the coding process in the analysis of data, to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

3.4 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness is a critical issue for the purposes of verifying the process and results of research inquiry. Ensuring and assessing the quality and integrity of the research study implies being able to trust the research results. As it is essential to ensure “quality assurance or data verification” (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2009:28), the findings or results of this research study must be consistent. Reliability implies dependability on consistency (Neuman, 2007:115) which suggests that data will yield the same results even though they are repeated at different times and in different circumstances. Interview training and checking interview guides can increase reliability for interview data.

Validity traditionally implies that research findings can be replicated and repeated because they is true or correct (Neuman, 2007:117). By means of this qualitative research, the researcher strove to achieve trustworthiness by providing an honest, authentic and accurate account of the phenomenon of aggression as experienced by Intermediate Phase male learners (Krefting, 1991). Krefting’s (1991) descriptions of Guba’s (1981) model for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research is delineated as four relevant criteria which are important for enhancing the rigour of the research study.
3.4.1 Truth-value (Credibility)

Truth-value establishes how confident the researcher is with the findings based on the research design, informants and context (Krefting: 1991:214 – 215). Truth-value is normally derived from the findings of human experiences as they are lived and perceived by participants. A qualitative research study is described as credible when it proffers accurate descriptions or interpretations of human experiences (Krefting: 1991:216).

Since all social research must respond to trustworthiness, the following trustworthiness criteria and strategies were applied in order to maintain the trustworthiness of this research (Krefting, 1991:214-215).

Prolonged and persistent fieldwork, including semi-structured, one-on-one phenomenological interviews and observations, provided for “corrobation” (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2009:31). The researcher as a human measurement tool increased the credibility of the research study by establishing her authority and acquiring characteristics identified by Miles and Huberman (1984), cited in Krefting (1991:220) which includes familiarity with the phenomenon of aggression, a strong theoretical knowledge, approaching the study topic from various theoretical perspectives and developing good investigative skills.

**Reflexivity:** The researcher was alert to how her presence might have influenced the participants' responses during the individual semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Vigilance was exercised in the interpretation of answers received during the semi-structured one-on-one interviews. To avoid researcher bias the researcher kept a field journal for the entire duration of the research.

**Triangulation:** This was established through observation and member checking. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews will be recorded and an example of a transcript will be added as Appendix G. The researcher and independent coders convened data analysis. The data findings were aligned to a literature control for the purposes of maintaining trustworthiness.

**Member Checking:** This is a technique that requires the regular disclosure of data obtained to the participants, thereby ensuring accuracy and dispelling misinterpretations (Krefting, 1991:219). The learners’ reviewed their descriptions of their experiences of aggression for purposes of accuracy and verification.
Interview Technique: Krefting (1991:220) suggests that the reframing of questions and the repetition of questions or expansion of questions increase credibility. The researcher used details about the participants' experience to validate observations and meaning for example: “Tell me more about that experience of aggression?”

Structural Coherence: Structural coherence is the process of ensuring that inexplicable inconsistencies do not exist between the data and their interpretations (Krefting, 1991:220). In the event of conflicting data, the researcher maintained credibility by offering an interpretation explaining any contradictions that existed in the identified themes. In addition structural coherence was maintained by focusing on learners lived experiences of aggression in school throughout the discussion of the themes and categories in relation to the research question.

3.4.2 Applicability (Transferability)
The criterion of applicability relates to the extent to which the findings and results can be applied to similar context.

Dense Description - Krefting (1991:220) advises that “dense background information” be provided for by establishing an “adequate audit base” to allow transferability judgement to be made by others. To this extent, the researcher retrieved maximum, rich, detailed and relevant data grounded in the phenomenon of aggression by means of open-ended questions on the experiences of aggression through observations and field notes. Each interview was audio-taped and coded.

3.4.3 Consistency (Dependability)
This criterion is concerned with whether findings would be consistent if the investigation was replicated. The entire process of documentation was subjected to an audit trial to establish dependability. Enhancing dependability was attained by conducting a code-recode process on the data collected during the analysis stage. The researcher revisited the coded section after two weeks to recode the same data and then made comparisons. Researcher and independent coders discussed prevalent threads in the data and established codes.

3.4.4 Neutrality (Confirmability)
Neutrality refers to the “freedom of bias in the research procedures and results” (Krefting, 1991: 216). Truth-value and applicability are preconditions for confirmability. A confirmability audit via the process of confirming data collected and analysis ensured that the research findings were the outcomes of participants’ responses. Detailed records including the audio-tapes, transcripts, the field notes, data findings and quotations are kept securely.
3.5 ETHICAL MEASURES

From inception the research process was guided by the ethical principles of doing research with Intermediate Phase male learners as human participants. In attempting to obtain answers to the research questions the necessary ethical measures of establishing a transparent and concise agreement, informed consent, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, agreeing on the disclosure of shared information were applied and adhered to.

Since researching the participants should not be an invasive process the researcher adhered to the ethical codes and standards, which guided and permeated the research process (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000:195). Since researching the lived experiences of the male learners in school raised sensitive ethical issues, the researcher was obliged to protect the rights of the participants. The researcher maintained sensitivity to the participants “social, cultural and historical location” (Mauthner, et al., 2008:46) in order to facilitate a problem-free research process.

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the North-West University, consent for the permission to conduct research from the Gauteng Education Department. Furthermore, informed consent was given from the purposefully selected Primary schools’ principals and governing bodies as well as from the Intermediate Phase male learners’ parents. The researcher also obtained informed assent from the learners themselves after consent was given by the male learner’s parents to participate willingly in the research.

The ethical principle of informed consent meaningfully informed participants about the research study thus enabling their choice to participate (consent form explicitly stated the purpose of the research study). Hence, an introduction followed by a statement of the research purpose, the research procedure and the description of the research process was stated. The informed consent form also informed participants that even if parents consented, the learners were not obliged to assent, and finally that their interviews will be audio-taped.

Preventing the violation of human rights and compliance to aspects of research ethics provided answers to two questions: “What is the ethically proper way to collect and report research data?” and “How should social scientists behave with respect to their research subject?” (Merthens & Ginsberg, 2009:12). The researcher thus applied the following ethical codes and norms which guided the research process morally and ethically:

- **Non-malfeasance:** The researcher had an obligation to protect the participants from harm or injury especially in within the confines of the research project and assured the
participants that they will not be targets for further aggression as their contributions will remain anonymous and confidential.

- **Beneficence:** This means to do well or benefit others (Merthens & Ginsberg, 2009:13). The researcher acted in ways that promoted the well-being of the participants and secondly evaluated whether the benefit of the study outweighed the negatives.

- **Respect:** Intermediate Phase male learners were regarded as “autonomous individuals” whose freedom of choice was respected as to ‘what’ and ‘how’ they shared their experiences of aggression in school (Merthens & Ginsberg, 2009:14).

- **Trust:** As trust was essential in the relationship between researcher and participants, the researcher devised a contract of roles for each other. The researcher met with the participants three times, firstly an introductory meeting to build rapport, secondly for the interviews where the participants explicated their experiences and understanding of aggression in school and finally for member checking.

In consideration of the ethical issues in researching the learners, the researcher was obligated to inform the participants of their participation rights:

- **Participants’ rights:** Participation was voluntary. Under no circumstances were the participants obligated to participate due to pressure. Once fully informed of the study, the freedom to participate was the right of the participant and their parent/guardian. A participant who chose not to participate was by no means prejudiced.

- **Right to withdraw:** Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any juncture of the research process. The researcher clarified this to the participants that withdrawal from the study was possible during the process and after completion of the interview.

- **Right of reviewing and withholding interviewing material:** Participants had the right to request that their drawings and interviews be withheld. Therefore, the participants were given the option to review transcript material for clarification purposes.

- **Rights to privacy:** In taking steps to protect the individuality and confidentiality of participants, the researcher reiterated to the participants that privacy will be maintained throughout the research study. To provide visibility the participants were informed of the process of interpreting the transcriptions from the initial stages to the final report. Participants remained anonymous or were ascribed pseudonyms. The researcher also guarded against the participants identities becoming known (anonymity) and recognizable through their words and drawings.

- **Confidentiality of records:** To assure participants that their personal particulars and the information which they have provided remains confidential, the supervisor of this study
kept all sources of information such as consent forms, transcripts, audiotapes, drawings in a safe place. The researcher took considerable care not to disclose any information received from the participants.

- Honesty: Honesty and transparency characterised the relationship between the researcher and the participant throughout the research process.

If the process of drawings and individual interviews caused any discomfort then the researcher sought to alleviate such discomforts. A debriefing session was provided for those participants who experienced heightened emotions during the interview. Arrangements were in place for access to a psychologist.

3.6 SUMMARY

This focus of this chapter was to outline an in-depth description of the research design and methodology for the purpose undertaking this qualitative study. A phenomenological approach via the process of exploration and description was employed to guide the collection of data by means of semi structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews during Phase one of this study. The research method describes the process of gaining access, participant selection, data collection methods and data analysis methods of this research. The strategies to ensure trustworthiness of the study and the ethical measures which guided this study were discussed.

The next chapter presents the data analysis and description of the findings of male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase in relation to the research question.
CHAPTER FOUR
DATA ANALYSIS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE FINDINGS: MALE LEARNERS’ EXPERIENCE OF AGGRESSION IN SCHOOL DURING THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE

To accept all experiences as raw material out of which the human spirit distils meanings and values is a part of the meaning of maturity (Papalia et al., 2007:522).

4.1 INTRODUCTION
This chapter presents the findings of the data collected during the one-on-one semi-structured phenomenological interviews, observation and field notes. The findings are elaborated upon in conjunction with the first phase of the research process which was to explore and describe male learner’s experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase.

4.1.1 Realisation of sample
Middle-childhood learners (ages 9-11) who experienced aggression, either as a victim or perpetrator, from grades 4 to 6 made up the purposive sample of 27 male learners, consisting of 9 learners at each of the three primary schools from Lenasia District 14, Gauteng. The purposively selected participants participated voluntarily with their parents consent in the icebreaker activity of drawing their experience of aggression in school, followed thereafter by a one-on-one semi-structured phenomenological interview. The interview schedule was facilitated in the medium of English. The learners who declined the ice-breaker activity went straight ahead with the interview as the drawings and data from the drawings as mentioned in chapter three, were not used for the purpose of data analysis but merely to facilitate an introduction to the interview. Intermediate Phase male learners were able to share “rich data” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a:50-51) on their lived experience of aggression in school. Data was saturated when recurrent themes and patterns emerged.

The interviews included the main question: “Can you tell me about an experience of aggression you have had at school?” followed by subsidiary questions like “What is your understanding of the term (word) aggression?” and “Can you think of a time when someone was aggressive towards you in school?” The interviews allowed for digression and the use of probing questions.
The interviews were taped with permission of the participants and were transcribed verbatim. The open coding of Tesch (Creswell, 2003:192) was implemented to analyse data from the interviews. With the assistance of independent coders the data was analysed and the themes and categories were finalised (Kvale, 2007). Observations and field notes were incorporated into the discussion of the findings of male learners’ experiences of aggression.

Rich data obtained from the male learners’ experiences of aggression in school allowed for the identification and description of three themes which are interrelated, thus enabling structural coherence in the discussion (Table 4.1). These three themes create a holistic picture on the phenomenon of aggression. Each theme will be discussed in detail in conjunction with the literature control.

**TABLE 4.1 IDENTIFIED THEMES AND CATEGORIES: Male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME 1</th>
<th>Intermediate Phase male learners describe aggression using concrete examples of their lived experience.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 1: Male learners’ experience aggression as verbal and physical.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 2: Male learner’s middle-childhood developmental stage and their experience of aggression.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 3: Male learners’ experience aggression as an emotion of anger.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 4: Male learners’ justify their aggressive behaviour.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME 2</th>
<th>Male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase forms a cycle of aggression.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 1: The role of school authority in the management of aggression and resolution of conflict.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME 3</td>
<td>Intermediate Phase male learners make suggestions in managing their own and others’ aggression in school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. A DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

As the focus of this research study was to explore and describe male learners’ experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase, data collected from the participants, subjected to analysis and interpretation provided the themes and categories for a qualitative description.

This chapter will now elicit on the description of male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase. Verbatim quotes were supported with a literature control in this chapter. All quotations in this section are verbatim as verbalised by the participants and not all participants were equally articulate.

The first theme indicates examples of the male learners’ concrete lived experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase. Theme two describes male learners’ experience of aggression which forms a cycle of aggression. The third theme states the suggestions made by male learners in managing their own and others’ aggression in school.

4.2.1 THEME 1: Intermediate Phase male learners' describe aggression using concrete examples of their lived experience.

Intermediate Phase male learners’ description of aggression translates into both verbal and physical aggression. Participants voiced their experience and opinion of aggression as the emotion of anger which is expressed verbally and physically.
4.2.1.1 Category 1: Male learners’ experience aggression as verbal and physical.

The open-ended question of: “Think of a time you experienced aggression here at school?” elicited some of the following responses:

“Uh when he was walking past and I put my leg out and he tripped. He caught me break time and another boy stopped him from hitting me. He caught me outside and another boy came (name of boy) picked up a bottle and he was hitting me with the bottle.” (P27)

“There was a boy who hit me for nothing because I was new at the school. Every day he was interfering with me and so he sweared my mother and he held me in a grip and he started hitting me in my stomach.” (P20)

“... that boy started me ... hit friend by mistake. She (refers to a boy) started hitting me. Tried to take money.” (P6)

“This one started, he took my colour (referring to pencil colour). This one hit me because I did start him.” (P5)

“He wanted to borrow the ruler. So I said no and then he was punching me, kicking me and choking me.” (P24)

“He kicked me on purpose ... I felt aggressive ... he started pushing and I hit him.” (P25)

“I punched him with two hands ... and I did kick him.” (P18)

“I tell him stop, stop pushing me, then he started smacking me.” (P11)

These above quotations indicate that the participants experience aggression as physical characterised by pushing, shoving, hitting, smacking, kicking, fighting, punching, pulling, and tripping. The prevalence of physical aggression amongst the participants is surprising as McDevitt and Ormrod (2010:538) and Papalia et al. (2010:319) maintain that physical aggression declines by middle-childhood. However whilst this phenomenon may not be universally applicable, children who engage in physical aggression may do so intentionally to obtain a goal or simply because they are reacting to frustration or provocation. As advocated in the literature having a “hostile attributional bias” towards someone could also manifest in physical aggression (Fiske, 2010:412).

Verbal forms of aggression included swearing, intimidation, threats, teasing, accusations and extortion. Some participants noted that:
“I was just standing there eating my bread ma’am. After that other boy came and he just swore me. He said f... (swear word) me. He called his friends to hit me.” (P15)

“They used to call me ‘crybaby’ and all of that. They used to say that I don’t like to come to school and that I was a mummy’s baby.” (P9)

“Some of them say like ‘your mother’ and all of those things.” (P12)

“They start teasing people ... the whole class call him dikkop (Big head).” (P25)

“Ma’am I swear people. I swear people.” (P22)

“Yes, because he swear, he swear my father madam. He say ... (Swear word) go tell your father.” (P5)

“He says, your mother’s p... see and then me I get angry, I don’t like that.” (P5)

“I swear him, he swear me first, and I swear him back even.” (P16)

“They always like teasing me.” (P1)

The meaning of aggression given by most participants is that aggression is to fight, to hurt someone or to hit someone which is usually triggered by anger. Fighting, identified by the participants as a form aggression, easily corresponds with the physical force that most people assume aggression to be (Geen, 2001:3). Interestingly one participant describes his aggression as a ‘... force...’ that he ‘... pulls out ...’ when asked where that aggression comes from.

The following quotations from participants’ description of aggression in school indicate their own understanding of aggression:

“... It’s the meaning of fight like when you having an argument ... you and your friends start arguing. Sometimes you fight and you think like you done the thing wrong and he says I done it wrong and we’ll start fighting and it goes on and on.” (P1)

“Aggression is fighting and hitting other children.” (P14)

“The boys fighting and hitting and say bad things.” (P15)

“Aggression is fighting and hitting other children.” (P14)

“When you always want to fight or hurt yourself or somebody.” (P25)

“When you fight.” (P10)
“Aggression is where a boy or girl gets angry and they lose control and they start fighting and hitting and when somebody swear their parents or something.” (P21)

“... means getting back at someone.” (P27)

These responses on the forms of aggressive behaviour, describing their conceptualisation of aggression has the predominant criteria of the intent to hurt, harm or injure. This intent to cause harm runs congruent to the theoretical characteristics of aggression (Baron & Richardson, 1994:6; Buss, 1967:1; Dollard, et al., 1939:11).

Whilst these descriptions of the participants’ understanding of aggression may appear to be linguistically limited due to participants’ age and developmental levels, the exploration of aggression experiences reveals features that can be inferred as “the occurrence of an aversive consequence” and “resistance of the attack by the perpetrator” and behaviour indicating in the “intent to harm” (Fiske, 2010:390; Baron & Richardson, 1994:6). The acts of aggression perpetrated or experienced by the participants in spite of it being trivial, subtle or intense in the form of pushing, kicking, stealing, accusing or swearing most certainly denotes an “aversive consequence” resulting in physical or psychological harm.

In addition to the above discussion on their understanding of aggression, other participants offer the following attributes, “... was angry ...”, “... upset ...” and “... hit other children...” Another participant stated that aggression is “... all about if you angry with me, I'm angry with you and that’s how we turned up to fight.” By implication anger, hitting and fighting constitutes physical aggression for these participants. Other incidents of verbal aggression (arguments) led to physical aggression and conflicts and minor infractions or innocuous events which resulted in bigger and more serious aggressive incidents such as hitting others with a bottle.

The participants’ experience of aggression can be categorised into categories and subtypes of aggression. Hostile aggression manifested in bullying, swearing, threatening, fighting and accusing whilst instrumental aggression included extortion, stealing and self-defence with the intent of hurting someone or achieving a goal (Baron, Branscombe & Byrne, 2009:357). Reactive aggression - quite common amongst Intermediate Phase male learners entailed striking back, blaming the other person and overreacting in response to a perceived threat (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:538). These responses can also be referred to as retaliatory aggression where participants respond to physical aggression characterised by kicking, punching, hitting and pushing with counterattacks (Baron & Richardson, 1994:341; Fiske, 2010:391). Proactive aggression, also a pertinent feature emerging from the exploration of
the participant’s aggressive experiences, involved bullying and getting the gang involved
(Fiske, 2010: 417). This type of aggression will be discussed in detail in Theme Two.

Aggression escalates from the verbal to the physical and embraces the above subtypes of
generation as evidenced by the following statements:

“He did hit my face by mistake and then I said, what’s your problem and then he said, what’s
your problem. Then he did push me and then he started fighting with me.” (P2)

“He did kick me on my leg when I was walking and then I said “What’s that?” He turned
around and said “Oh ja! (oh yes) I must still catch you because the other time you took a one
rand from me ..., then did push me and I started hitting him.” (P2)

“You get to higher grades and then the bigger children start bullying you and then you must
defend yourself.” (P3)

“Swear them and give them the rights (denotes punches).” (P28)

“Give me your pocket money; give me your pocket money. I said “I don’t have! He said he’ll
came back and catch (get) me.” (P6)

These actual experiences of aggression in its various categorical subtypes are situated in
school and typically involve Intermediate Phase male learners exhibiting aggressive
tendencies mainly towards other male learners.

4.2.1.2 Category 2: Male learners’ middle-childhood developmental stage and their
experience of aggression.

The concrete descriptions and experiences of aggression espoused by participants in school
implicitly reflect the developmental level of the participants in terms of “what can be
concretely visualised or imagined from past experiences,” Donald et al., (2006:55) otherwise
referred to as the “pre-operational stage” by Piaget (1953). Learners in the pre-operational
developmental phase are usually between the ages of 2 and 5 and this is characterised by
egocentricism which implies that it is difficult to take other peoples' perspectives and results
in a one-sided conversation (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:200).

Conversely middle-childhood learners, as described by Piaget in Donald et al., (2006:55)
should function at the concrete operational stage of age's seven to eleven. Significant
characteristics of this stage are the transition to logical ways of thinking, abilities to converse,
reverse, seriate and classify. By implication learners at the concrete stage should be able to anticipate problems or figure out ways and strategies to cope with aggression. More importantly egocentric thinking diminishes at this stage (Papalia et al., 2010:380). Consequently most of these participants demonstrate egocentric thinking which epitomises “seeing the world” of aggression “from ones point of view” (Donald et al., 2006:55).

The following responses indicate that it seems difficult for some of these participants to see matters from the victim’s or perpetrator’s perspective.

“That boy started me.” (P5)

“She (refers to a boy) hit first.” (P6)

“I just got angry and I just hit him by mistake but I never think about my actions.” (P20)

According to Geen (2001:3), cognitive processes of judgement “precede aggression.” In contrast to judgment, rationalisation and thought prior to responding aggressively, the above statements taken from the data seems to reveal that middle-childhood learners who tend to aggress rarely employ cognitive processes of thought and judgement prior to aggressing. These statements reveal their egocentric thinking as they acted hastily or impulsively without considering the matter with foresight. The above discussion in relation to Freud’s psychoanalysis theory maintains that a person’s behaviour is motivated by the ability of the ego to cope with tension caused by the death drive by taking “social reality into account” by means of “sensory perception, rational thinking, memory and learning” (Meyer et al., 2008:54). The ego pertains to the mind involved in thinking and reasoning. In addition the ego operates on a level of consciousness (Meyer et al., 2008:54). In other words the ego is a force to be reckoned with for it to evaluate and execute the wishes of the death drive appropriately and timeously. In examining the participants’ responses to aggression in light of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, one can assume that the ego is weak as the participant did not plan and attend to matters from the perspective of reality.

An egocentric frame of reference and lack of mental capacity to rationalise actions initiates impulsive and hasty responses. This also conceptually relates to Loevingers’ (1976) theory of development: Egocentric Stage two – Impulsive and stage three - Self-protecting. Furthermore this egocentric thinking impacts on participant’s behaviour and many resort to aggression to solve issues. Essentially the relevance and central idea of egocentrism and impulsiveness in relation to the Intermediate Phase is that learners lack the personal capacity to rationalise their actions and even though they have access to logical ways of thinking, their emotions shroud or influence how they cope and manage conflict, tension and aggression (Delfos, 2004).
The participants focus on aggressive incidents solely from their point of view, that is, from their individualistic mindset, rather than that of others’. It seems as if they lack an understanding and judgment for the fact that their behaviour initiated and impacted on the victim's behaviour. Hence they often maintain the idea that the other was to blame for their aggressive behaviour at school. Playing the blame game reflects a lack of accountability or ownership for their aggressive behaviour. The blame game does not resolve and it escalates into more serious aggressive incidents. This will be further elaborated on in Section 4.2.2 Theme Two.

Three ideas can be ascertained from the participants’ experiences of aggression in school. Firstly, there are no major differences in their translation of experiences of aggression. In spite of differences in the age band, 9 to 11 year old learners’ ability to rationalise aggression is limited to the concrete. Secondly, it is seems that their experiences of aggression influence or is influenced by their emotions as visible in their accounts of aggression. Thirdly, the cognitive development of Intermediate Phase male learners which translates to a concrete level at a pre-operational stage cannot be seen in isolation, as the inability to look at circumstances from others’ viewpoints reflects moral reasoning which is an interrelated component of aggressive behaviour (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:524).

4.2.1.3 Category 3: Male learners’ experience aggression as an emotion of anger.

The participants equated aggression to anger. It seems that the male learners did not perceive a distinction between aggression and anger. A regular and distinct feature in the data is that anger is synonymous with aggression and is the most consistent emotion related to aggression as evidenced by the following quotes:

“Someone getting angry, trying to hit you like going to take your money, something like that.” (P5)

“Uh, I was too angry and when I’m angry I can’t control myself.” (P4)

“All about you if you angry with me and I’m angry with you and that’s how we turned up to fight.” (P9)

“Aggression is when you can’t control your anger.” (P20)

“Like I can’t control it. I get so angry that I just like snap and I start going mad.” (P21)
“... he says your mother’s p... (swear word), see and then me, I get angry. I don't like it.” (P5)

In pursuit of this discussion, the anger response elicits the intent to harm a person physically or psychologically. The participants indicate that their anger sometimes erupts into verbal and physical behaviour. In most instances anger arouses the basic instinct which is to fight. Theoretically aligned, the reaction emanating from anger is the fight or flight instinct (Fiske, 2010:403). According to Berkowitz (1993:20), anger is distinguishable from aggression in that aggression is intentionally goal-directed behaviour, whereas anger, in contrast, is a feeling or emotional experience that is an internal physiological response devoid of goal direction. Intermediate Phase male learners’ associate anger with aggression even though theoretically defined, aggression is not angry feelings but the intentional behaviour to harm (Berkowitz, 1993). Considering their developmental levels it would not be that simple for them to distinguish between anger and aggression.

“When someone is angry on another person and he can’t handle what he is doing because he is angry. And he loses his temper. They call it temper but for me its aggression. I can show that I’m not bang (scared) for you, so that I can hit you back. I’m aggressive when I’m angry and I don’t know what I’m doing but I’m fighting with you.” (P9)

According to the above response of a participant, he sees anger as aggression. The feeling of anger is associated with temper. Here the participant is “acting on their angry or negative feelings” (Louw & Louw, 2007:261). “... I’m not bang (scared) for you...” could indicate feelings of pride, competition and egocentric thinking (Delfos, 2004). “I don’t know what I’m doing” reveals lack of self-reflection within the cognitive domain.

When anger is aroused within the learners two common reactions occur: withdraw or attack verbally or physically which concurs with the “fight or flight instinct” (Fiske, 2010:403). As revealed from the statements of the participants, the anger that is evoked results in an aggressive word or action, for example: “... mad feelings and angry ... mmm, I must hit them back until they bleed.” This response indicates an anger which motivates the participant to incur physical harm and injury. Berkowitz (1993:26) views this type of anger as impulsive or emotional anger as it impels the urge to injure the victim. The participants advocate the claim of anger impelling aggressive behaviour without concern for thinking about its consequences. When one considers the anger experience of the Intermediate Phase male learners it becomes evident that anger serves as a conduit enhancing aggressive behaviour through physical acts of hitting, kicking, punching, bullying and verbal acts of threats, name-calling and swearing.
The following responses are consistent with the above discussed notion. In response to the question “why did you punch him with those two hands and kick him?” the participant replied “… because I was angry.” Similarly another response was “… uh I was too angry and when I’m angry I can’t control myself …” that indicates the negative effect of anger enhancing the possibility of an aggressive act. The response indicates that the participant could not control his anger feelings, hence the outbursts.

Even though anger does not directly instigate aggressive behaviours, it can be inferred from the responses of the participants that they hold the belief that anger incurs aggressive behaviours and vice versa that aggressive behaviours eradicates the experience of anger (Berkowitz, 1993:20). This “anger aggression” experienced by the participants simply denotes affective aggression targeted towards “injuring the provoking person” (Geen, 2001:4).

“It feels like you teaching someone a lesson of what they must not say the thing next time.” (P10)

In continuation of the preceding discussion it is evident that the emotion of anger is influenced by one’s internal level of cognitive and moral development and vice versa as “emotions energise thinking and acting” (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:419). The thought processes embracing values, attitudes and mental capacities impels one’s feelings of anger. According to Baron and Richardson (1994:137), if frustration produces a negative effect, this is interpreted as anger, the feeling of anger then enhances the desire to perform an aggressive act.

Evidently data gathered from the participants indicates that they experience anger as a result of an injustice, injury or a violation of their rights and privileges. They express disapproval of the other learners’ actions towards them and feel a sense of being wronged. In terms of the General Aggression Model frustration or provocation known as situational factors intertwined with one’s emotional state contribute to an aggressive outburst (Mynhardt, 2009:96; Baron, et al., 2009:340).

“Why should I always sit down and let other people bully me. I also got a chance, now I’m also a person.” (P2)

“When the boys sweared my mother and then I hit him.” (P10)

“Ma’am I was naar (nauseous). That other boy came to me and he pushed me so. I was angry and I hit him.” (P19)
Anger stems from egocentric thoughts and beliefs that they deserve something or that they can exert certain rights which are referred to as social egocentricism where there is no consideration of others' feelings (Delfos, 2004:103). When these rights or privileges are transgressed or denied a feeling of anger is aroused. If this need is not met the participants go on the warpath which leads to hostile or instrumental aggression. Intermediate Phase male learners justify and rationalise their anger on the egocentric basis that they must get what they want when they want it. This notion is similar to Freud's death drive (Meyer et al., 2008:54) where aggression is externalised from the self towards others (Baron & Richardson, 1994:37).

Although anger is an internal personal physiological experience (Berkowitz, 1993:20), many of the participants attribute anger to something or someone else: “... he pushed me...”; “... he started first...”; “... he hit me for nothing...”; “... I did not do nothing,” and “... he did that on purpose...” These quotations indicate that the participants’ actions or words constitute provocation by external factors or aggressive cues in the environment resulting in feelings of being frustrated, annoyed, irritated and perturbed (Fiske, 2010:409-410). Consequently these negative feelings with regard to the external factors persist and prevail long after the incident has occurred. The feeling of anger which embraces the above-mentioned experiences may resurface due to an environmental factor which triggered the onset of this anger, culminating in an aggressive incident.

The above responses by the participants also reflect the participants’ thought processes about the provocation. The others’ actions produce angry feelings which result in retaliating or defending themselves. This pattern indicates the “interactive process” of aggression (Baron & Richardson, 1994:143). It also highlights the interaction of the cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects of a person (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:524; Mynhardt, 2009:96).

The participants frequently blame circumstances and others for their feelings of anger. In light of theoretical advocacy the participants misattribute these feelings as a result of their inability to self-reflect (Delfos 2004:76) and self-examine or introspect the reason for an anger experience from their cognitive and moral bases. Whilst anger may be naturally inherent in an individual's psyche, individuals fail to apply the defence mechanism of 'sublimation' (Meyer et al., 2008:60) whereby aggressive drive energy can be channelled into a socially acceptable activity.

The above discussion sheds light that the experience of anger accompanying the inclination to aggress is affected by environmental stimuli. The internal characteristics of the individual interacting with situational factors also impact on the tendency to aggress (Baron et al., 2009:356-357).
The question that arises from the preceding discussion on aggression equated with anger is: If anger is a normal, natural, inherent trait, is it not possible for the male learners to choose not to act on the anger impulses. Choosing to deal with how anger is interpreted and whether anger should restrict the drive to aggress implies adopting the right attitudes which basically constitutes making moral choices. The participants seem to lack an understanding that whilst anger is a natural phenomenon, anger needs to be managed and/or alternatively channelled into behaviours that would not have the intent to incur psychological and physical harm both to themselves and others.

4.2.1.4 Category 4: Male learners’ justify their aggressive behaviour.

The participants indicate issues of right and wrong, which bring to focus the moral development of the perpetrators and victims. An open-ended question posed to learners during the interview was “Do you think it is okay for boys to behave aggressively, if so why or why not?” Most participants’ response was an explicit “no” in their answers. However justifying and rationalising their response proved to be a not so easy task as they hesitated in their responses, for example one participant said “… because …” and another said “… it’s wrong…”

The following responses indicate a sense of the participants’ ability to reason morally in terms of Piaget’s and Kohlberg’s developmental frameworks (Papalia et al., 2010); however implementing these moral judgements prior to aggressing is not easy. The motivations for not aggressing in the following participants’ responses is based on the empathy as indicated by the concern for causing pain to a person, abiding by environmental rules, fear of punishment and the need to protect the ones you love.

“It’s not right because things like you, you can bully a person, you can put a person in hospital I... you feel like you caused it, you feel bad.” (P1)

“Boys are stronger. They’re stronger ... because if they hurt someone they can go to jail.” (P2)

“Because they can hurt someone else and it can turn out to be a bad situation. Where if you get cross or something you gonna turn around and do it all in your little sister or either you going to hurt somebody, someone’s feelings.” (P9)

If the aggressive behaviour by boys is wrong, as they implicitly state, then why do they choose to aggress, as opposed to doing what is morally right. A follow-up question: “What
kinds of feelings and thoughts did you have in your mind?” in relation to a previous question of “how did you express feelings of aggression towards him?” elicited the following response from one participant: “I seen him run, I turned, went past ... his leg was running I fall, scraped my leg?” Other participants found it difficult to express their thoughts and feelings in the form of a supporting argument. Participants justified that aggressive behaviour was morally unacceptable as it incurred pain, hurt and had consequences of punishment. Some participants displayed a transition to higher levels of moral thinking in spite of their demonstrating aggressive behaviours. The participants stated:

“It’s not right because huh, certain things like you can kill a person, you can put a person in hospital ... you can feel like you the one who caused it.” (P1)

“I did feel so bad.” (P14)

“Ma’am because they’ll get in trouble and if a prefect sees you they’ll take you to the office and they’ll tell, phone your parents and you’ll get punished at home.” (P27)

The above responses indicates the participants’ moral reasoning according to moral principles emanating from societal and cultural values and attitudes that is synonymous with what society regards as absolute morality and obedience. The “… you feel bad …” response indicates feelings of shame and guilt. It also reveals that the participant realizes that he has done something wrong. From the responses given by the participants in relation to moral development it is evident that most of them seem to function on a pre-conventional development stage, which Fiske (2010:379) describes as ‘hedonistic,’ that is, concerned with the personal self, and they behave with a view to reward and punishment rather than conventionally, which is supposed to be typical for middle childhood. Even though moral reasoning is dependent on factors such as age and/or education (Papalia et al., 2010:454), would it be safe to conclude that perhaps other areas such as emotions, personal characteristics and social and environmental influences predisposes participants to doing the wrong instead of the right?

Responses to the questions, “What goes through your mind when you did those things? and “Why did you do that?” required the participants to self-reflect. Common responses were “no”, or a shrugging of the participants shoulders. A number of participants seem to find it difficult to self-reflect. In essence it appears that they found it easier to explicate the problem or behaviour rather than rationalising and self-reflecting. As discussed in advocacy of the literature, Delfos (2004) states that children with externalising conduct disorder at the pre-conventional development stage find it difficult to self-reflect, and hence have inadequate self-reflection. On the contrary, children with an internalising conduct disorder consistently
self-reflect simply because of ‘feelings of guilt or fear’ and children with the ability to self-reflect have a strong sense of ‘mine and thine’ (Delfos, 2004:96).

Stealing and extortion by children as a form of instrumental aggression reflects poor self-reflection. In terms of the socio-moral development framework by Liese (2003:166), stealing and extortion would reflect low moral reasoning as the learners behaviours are motivated by self-interests. Perpetual and habitual stealing resembles egocentric thinking as the individual prioritizes his needs over the consequences of facing the punishment. The example below, where a participant shared his experiences of bullying typically indicates a low level of moral reasoning where his physiological needs supersede his concern for the behaviour being wrong “Sometimes when I’m hungry I take their (other learners) food ...” Furthermore his moral reasoning demonstrates a lack of fear for the consequences of punishment.

The moral development of participants with experiences of aggression is generally characterised by justice and competition (Delfos, 2004:95). As suggested by Delfos (2004), the focus of justice in combination with egocentric thinking usually implies seeing circumstances from one’s perspective and being unable to put oneself into the shoes of another. This capacity for justice and competition frequently impels participants into various forms of aggressive behaviours. The propensity to feel empathy is non-existent as they transgress morally in pursuit of their self-interests. The participants find it difficult to understand that they are responsible for causing or contributing to another child’s behaviour. Egocentric thinking impacting on moral thought makes it difficult for them to understand the concept of “mine and thine” and the functioning of the conscience is predominant feature of moral thinking (Delfos, 2004:96). Since there is a weak sense of “mine and thine” aggressive children are mostly not developed beyond the pre-conventional development stage (Delfos, 2004:96). This stage of moral development is up to more or less the age of 10 where obedience, punishment, feelings of fear and guilt are significant features.

The choice of refraining from aggressive behaviour or not comes to the fore as it needs to be explained and advocated for in terms of existing theories on moral development. Having a system of acceptable values generally undergirds the concept of morality. Essentially doing right or wrong characterises moral choices (Delfos, 2004:60).

Participants who have trouble understanding and evaluating their behaviour find it very easy to shift blame and accuse others when faced with an aggressive dilemma: “... he started first ...” started is usually attributed as moral justification. As discussed in confirmation with Kohlberg’s (1976) theory of moral development, the fear for punishment, as opposed to making the right choices serves as impetus for moral reasoning (Donald et al., 2006:75). The concern for right or wrong to aggress is justly stated. According to the participants’ interviews
their motivations for making decisions to aggress does not seem to be based on empathy, concern for the other person, justice or even the harm done to the other person.

The socio-moral development framework by (Liese, 2003:166) suggests a pattern for low-level reasoning and high-level reasoning. Within this categorical framework individualism, that is self-interest (egocentric thinking) for “self preservation and self protection,” which are motivational factors for aggressive behaviour, epitomises the moral functioning of learners in schools (Liese, 2003:166). To reiterate this point further, Baron et al. (2009:332) maintain that “moral integrity”, “moral hypocrisy” and “self-interest” motivate one’s behaviour. Hence it is not surprising why the aggressive behaviour of the participants in school takes priority over attitudes which would otherwise show regard for the laws and rules of school and society (Papalia et al., 2010:355).

In consideration of the participants’ experience of aggression one is able to acquire an understanding of their moral development. It appears that even though Intermediate Phase male learners have the capacity for high levels of moral reasoning in terms of Piaget’s (1953) and Kohlberg’s (1976) developmental frameworks, their aggressive behaviours do not justify their moral thinking. In conclusion of this discussion of Theme One, understanding male learners’ justification for why boys should or should not aggress provides a reflection of their level of moral reasoning on a preconventional developmental level.

4.2.2 THEME 2: Male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase forms a cycle of aggression.

Theme Two reflects a cycle of aggression as experienced by the participants in this study. The cycle of aggression is the overarching theme discussed in the three categories to follow. The cycle of aggression can be viewed as consisting of three phases which escalate from the triggers of aggression to the instigation of aggressive responses culminating in the consequences of aggression (see Diagram 4.1). The triggers are characterised by signals or emotions that are associated with the anger, frustration or tension that is escalating within the participant which provokes a behavioural response in the form of a verbal or physical response. These triggers then lead to a hostile or instrumental form of aggression which produces negative results. The consequences depict feelings of hurt, being scared and punishment experienced by both perpetrator and/or victim. Calling on authority, telling the teachers, for example, and parents called to school are also regarded as a consequence as noted in the following interview extract.
“That boy ... (Name of another participant). Because I didn’t know what got into my head and then I just went after him and his friends. Then I just started hitting all of them and then they then they had to call my parents in. Then they took. Then those boys went to the police station to lay a case and then my mother tried to stop them from laying a case and then they couldn’t because they finished did it and then I got grounded for a month...” (P3)

**Diagram 4.1** Male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase forms a cycle of aggression
A characteristic pattern of these aggressive incidents is that the varied triggers of aggression lead to an aversive response and its consequences. A number of learners shared experiences indicating that the aggressive incidents were reciprocated as revenge and self-defence following a previous aggressive incident. The cycle of aggression continues when perpetrators perpetuate the aggressive behaviour towards the same victim at another time or place in the school. Aggressive incidents that started on the playground or classroom extend or traverse to other activities in and out of the school thereby initiating the cyclical nature of aggression.

“He did kick me on my leg when I was walking and then I said, what’s your problem? He turned around and said, oh ja (yes), I must still catch you because the other time you took a one rand from me and uh, ja (yes) you never pay me back. So I said here’s your money. Then he said why you took so long. Then he did push me and I started hitting him.” (P2)

“And then, then I said I’m going to get you in home time. Then we started fighting and I punched him in the stomach by the gates and he blocked and after that he called all his friends, brothers, brothers friends to me and he started and he wanted to fight with me and then I went madam ……….’s class. And I stayed in madam X...” (P21)

**Diagram 4.2 Triggers in the cycle of aggression**
“They hit me by mistake. I didn’t do nothing. They see me standing there. I swear by them. I say voetsek (get out). Then they start to hit me. I hit them back.” (P22)

“Oh when he was walking past and I put my leg out and he tripped. He caught me break time and another boy stopped him from hitting me. He caught me outside. Another boy … (name of boy) picked up a bottle and he was hitting me with a bottle.” (P27)

The triggers of aggression, namely provocation, false accusations, extortion, and victimisation (Diagram 4.2) escalate out of control from verbal aggression and result in physical aggression. The researcher views aggression that is also triggered by even something innocuous such as hiding possessions or taking one’s possessions. The triggers of aggressive behaviour relate to trite issues that very often do not match the outcome. In addition these minor triggers arouse the anger of the other learner who retaliates with more intense aggression. The angry feeling intensifies and the perpetrator and victim engage in verbal and physical aggression. For instance one participant responded with: “hit me in the face by mistake.” The perpetuation of the cycle of aggression amongst the participants in school have typical features of an aggressor exhibiting a “refusal of punishment, offence as the best form of defence, fight or flight response, conditioned responses and the norm of reciprocity” (Long, 2007:93).

Damaging property, name calling and stealing money, or making jokes reflect attitudes of arrogance and defiance. Such incidents are often intentional. No provocation is also noted as a trigger for aggression (Baron & Richardson, 1994):

“I used to fight for nothing. I don’t know what happens to me when I fight.” (P10)

“So he starts. He likes to see fights. Because he likes to see fights he starts the fight …” (P12)

“He never do it by mistake, he did it just for fun.” (P19)

“They’ll do something for no reason.” (P21)

In attempting to understand why the participants would exhibit no provocation as a reason to aggress, Berkowitz (1993:12) contends that “aggression can be pleasurable,” especially when the aggressor satisfies his emotional distress by hurting others. Emotional aggressors derive pleasure from achieving their goal directed behaviour of hurting others. Such individuals may also aggress even in the absence of being emotionally urged, simply because they learned it as a fun or pleasurable behaviour.
Verbal aggression, such as swearing, escalates and results in physical aggression. Incidents of ‘pushing’ led to physical aggression. Verbal repartee initiated the aggressive behaviour of reacting with hitting (Botha, 2006). Fighting is a typical form of aggressive behaviour triggered by verbal provocation, for example, “... swearing my mother...” and “… swearing my father...” “Swearing the parents,” and/or their peers, that is, insulting people, which is quite a common aggressive trend among the participants, fuels reciprocal aggression (Long, 2007:93). Accusations of learners stealing money and possessions also trigger aggressive responses. In situations of extorting money participants submit to the demands for fear of retribution from the instigator. Other perpetrators take possessions as a means for repayment. The perpetrator threatens the victim in order to extort. The participants’ reactions to the triggers of aggression contributed to other forms of aggressive behaviour such as teasing, harassing and bullying.

This cycle of aggression is conceptually related to the theoretical formulation of where an aggressive condition stimulates aggressive reactions simply to eliminate or lessen the unpleasant condition, or the target is attacked even though the target has not done anything to provoke the victim (Berkowitz, 1993:53).

Data extracted about the experiences of provocation within the cycle of aggression is consistent with the descriptions of Baron and Richardson (1994:140), described as “playing the dozens” which is a “ritualised trading of provocations.” The participants who have been pushed, teased, tripped, kicked and bullied develop angry feelings towards the perpetrator. An argument ensues between the perpetrator and the victim. This interactive process of aggression escalates between the two learners and culminates in overt aggression in the form of retaliation or defence (Baron & Richardson, 1994:142).

The cycle of aggression indicates aggressive behaviours that range from innocuous incidents to more serious incidents. As evidenced from the participants responses anger is usually the conduit for aggressive altercations. The cycle of aggression as experienced by participants in school indicate that some of the male learners provoke others just out of habit and others gratify their self-serving egos by engaging in aggression and others reciprocate the aggression in self-defence, thus perpetuating the cycle of aggression.

“They force you to fight.” (P4)

“... teasing me.” (P27)

“I used to be quiet and then people used to bully me ... I started changing ... I can’t leave them to bully me anymore.” (P2)
“... they like to start me.” (P5)

“They hit me in because I didn’t want to fight.” (P22)

“ma’am they start me when I do nothing. They start me.” (P21)

These explanations that the participants offer in response to the causes for their involvement in aggression within the cycle of aggression are referred to as attributions which theoretically pertains to one’s belief about the causes of one’s own successes and failure (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:G-I). As attribution plays a significant role in seeking understanding the occurrence of events, the participants tend to cast blame on other persons thereby indicating an external locus of control (Fiske, 2010:412; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:491).

The triggers for aggressive incidents are in actuality misattributed to their perception of other learners being hostile or provocative towards them. Misattribution is quite prominent in the cycle of aggression. The participants misattribute by offering reasons that the aggressive incident was more often than not initiated by the target. They blame the target/victim whereas the aggression may have been due to their own provocation and hostile attitudes. Consequently these misattributions, often triggered by something innocuous or ambiguous, cause an escalation within the aggressive cycle (Baron & Richardson, 1994:143).

According to McDevitt and Ormrod (2010:491), misattribution about one’s behaviour can be the result of “self-constructed interpretations” that do not always reflect reality. In relation to this statement the misattributions of Intermediate Phase male learners about the triggers of aggression represents misconception of other’s behaviours as well as a “misinterpretation or mislabelling” of one’s own emotions such as anger, hostility and fear (Baron & Richardson, 1994:264).

This misinterpretation and mislabelling reflects the egocentric thinking and moral reasoning of the participants which is otherwise known as a self-serving bias which attributes ones adversity to external factors (Baron et al., 2009:93). By stating the responses of: “... he did that on purpose...”; “... he was saying I will hold you on purpose...” and “... they like to start me...” these male learners are in actual fact implementing Vygotsky’s strategy of “self talk” (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:212), but in a negative and hostile manner as they are generalising and drawing irrational conclusions. Here again it seems as if irrational reasoning evokes the feelings of anger which lead to the misinterpretation of the other learner’s behaviour and results in instrumental, retaliatory or defensive aggressive behaviour.

The participants also find it easy to place the burden of blame and guilt on others where in fact the cause for an aggressive event could merely be the result of a situational factor. For
instance, a participant who was accidently hit by a soccer ball shared that that act was intentional. The victim misattributes the cause to the hostile attributional bias of the person who kicked the ball when instead it was an unintentional and uncontrolled attribute of the object.

The act of misattribution by the participants seems to be quite normal and common. There are two possible reasons why the participants find it so easy to blame others first, as Drew (2004:57) states that telling the truth about an aggressive action makes one look bad and lands them in trouble. Secondly, others merely misattribute simply because it is habitual. Once again these perspectives-taking skills reflect illogical thinking and reacting without reasoning based on the cognitive moral development of the learner (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:228).

In hindsight the participants' egocentricism prevents them from admitting their inadequacies. The process of misattribution is also due to biases and errors which are evident from the above discussion on misattribution (Fiske, 2010:114). The participants frequently make dispositional attributions to fulfil their self-serving bias in blaming either the victim or target (Fiske, 2010:120-121). Some participants misinterpret thoughts and motives and interpret accidents as deliberate attempts to cause harm. Misattribution in context of this study may firstly be due to social cognition which plays a role in the participants’ aggressive behaviours in which aggressive male learners tend to lack the ability to view the incident from the other person’s perspective. Secondly, the participants tend to “misinterpret social cues” and often perceive the victim’s behaviour as having a hostile attribution bias (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:538). The following quotation illustrates the participants’ experience with regards to misattribution:

Interviewer: “Where do you think these boys learn to trip children and kick?”

Participant: “... from TV."

Participant 22: “mmm, wrestling.”

Participant: “... from watching TV, wrestling, things like that.”

Participant 10: “Boys is naughty and they learn fighting from TV.”

These preceding accounts in relation to the cycle of aggression, address the influence of media aggression on their conceptualisation of aggression. These responses reflect an exposure to media violence as a number of the participants seem to be quite familiar with wrestling and advocate that wrestling is the medium by which they are acculturated into aggressive behaviours of fighting. In terms of the general aggression model (GAM) and the
Social Learning Theory (Baron et al., 2009:341) these participants have learned aggressive behaviours firstly by observing wrestlers being awarded for their aggressive behaviours and secondly for the fact wrestling is a glamorised sport. The fact that some of these participants have been involved in aggression provides support for the evidence that the observation of aggressive behaviours in media may have induced aggressive responses which manifested in other forms of aggression that were discussed in Theme One (Krahe, 2001:92).

The participants’ experiences of aggression revealed that in some instances the participants were directly imitating or re-enacting the behaviours of wrestling during their rough and tumble play activities which then escalated into a serious aggressive event simply because there was pain incurred from the physical tussle. For example:

“We were playing wrestling and it came near to the end, then we hurt each other. I'm not saying that I hurt him first oh that he hurt me first. We hurt each other. It was like me and ... (name of boy), small brother, then me ... I was like fighting with them like in a real fight. Then it was like a whole of children (group of children) coming to stop like prefects and then the teachers.” (P1)

Then there were other incidents where various types of aggressive behaviours manifested as ‘aggressive scripts’ (Krahe, 2001:112) which were internalised into their cognitive domains.

Interviewer: “Why did you stop watching wrestling?”

Participant 10: “Because I was like rough when I was watching wrestling. Getting all the ideas from that.”

Interviewer: “What ideas where you getting from watching TV?”

Participant 10: “Fighting.”

In another interview:

Participant 11: “They look in the movies then they can see you can fight like this. Let's start with other children, madam.”

Interviewer: “What movies are boys watching?”

Participant 11: “Jackie Chan.”

Participant 28: “From fathers, from wrestling and friends.”

The above verbatim quotes, detailing the influence of media violence on aggressive behaviours including the rationale for eliminating his viewing of wrestling, reflects a transition
to higher order thinking on a concrete operational developmental stage. This separation from wrestling serving as a conduit for aggression is referred to as a “distancing,” and suppresses the “aggression enhancing effect” (Krahe, 2001:98). This participant’s experience shows support for the learning of “aggressive scripts” as he became desensitised by exposure to media violence as voiced by: “… for nothing I used to fight …” (Fiske, 2010:407; Krahe, 2001:112). Even though this learner realised and took cognisance of his susceptibility to the effects of media violence on his behaviour, one cannot take it for granted that the media-aggression link is causation for his aggressive behaviour.

The experiences shared by the participants also indicate “identification with the aggressor” in media as they represent power and evoke admiration (Krahe, 2001:98). ‘Jackie Chan’ (a movie star who uses his karate skills to ward off villains) is one example who serves as an attractive model illustrating power through his karate efforts to counterattack violence. Whilst his antics are fictional middle-childhood learners imitate and model the aggressor’s behaviour simply because they aspire to being similar (Kahn, 2009:33). Another link between the media and middle-childhood aggression is that the participants “see others using aggression to solve their problems” (Berkowitz, 1993:163).

4.2.2.1 Category 1: The role of school authority in the management of aggression and resolution of conflict

Relevant comments made by the participants about the role of school authority in managing aggressive behaviours and resolving conflict included:

“I want to hit them but they tell the teacher that I’m hitting them for nothing.” (P10)

“When madam go out and I was started to hit them. When madam came I no more hit him.” (P5)

“After that madam (name of teacher) stopped us and they sent us to the office to Mr … (name of teacher) … he said “stop fighting.” (P23)

“The teacher saw and she did nothing. She just pulled back the boy away from me.” (P20)

“I pushed him back and then I started to hit him again and again, my madam took me to the office.” (P2)

“He said, I must go to the office. They took me to madam (name of teacher). Madam … (name of teacher) hit me. I feel angry.” (P22)
The above quotations that surfaced illustrate three important issues on the perceptions of the participants regarding the role of the authority in managing aggression and resolution of conflict in school. Firstly the participants’ are conscious of the teachers/principals as authority figures who are supposed to intervene in a conflict situation. As this issue does not focus on aggressive behaviours it will not be elaborated on.

Secondly, in the absence of authority figures, the participants will resort to or resume aggressive behaviour. This issue will not be elaborated upon in this category as it pertains to the participants’ self-regulation, moral reasoning and cognitive development which are discussed throughout the data findings.

Thirdly, and quite significantly authoritative figures such as the teachers and/or principals do not manage or resolve learners’ aggression or conflict situations. This issue highlights the fact that the perpetrators’ behaviour has been inappropriate and unacceptable; the victim has suffered an injustice which therefore necessitates intervention from an authority figure such as the principal in the form of meting out disciplinary measures and providing support for the victim. This issue is elaborated upon as the teachers’ responses to aggressive behaviours provide limited opportunities for the learners to clarify, evaluate and discuss their actions and their consequence.

Epp and Watkinson’s (1996:1) argument that schools are “complicit in the abuse of children through systemic violence” and that the learners reactions to this “contributes to other forms of violence” underpins the conceptual framework of category two, namely the role of authority, that is, the principal and management in managing aggression and conflict resolution in school, in the following discussion.

In the participants’ responses to the role of authority, it seems apparent that aggressive behaviour is handled ineptly and inappropriately by teachers and principals at their schools. The teacher who is supposed to have the first-hand experience with anti-social behaviour transfers the problem to the principal, instead of dealing with it strategically. In addition to this the principal merely responds to the perpetrator and victim with “stop fighting.” The request to “... stop fighting ...” did not attempt to resolve the problem. It did not root out the cause of the problem. The words “... stop fighting ...” do nothing in terms of understanding the effects of harm and trauma suffered by the victim. Furthermore, regardless of the nature or the severity of the aggressive transgression, this can result in the perpetrator to going unpunished and without guidance he may not understand that his behaviour is destructive and hampers effective relationships. According to Mynhardt (2009:96), an exposure to repeated aggression impacts one cognitive domain and eventually leads to persons being primed for aggression, that is, they develop cognitive scripts on aggression.
The response of “stop fighting” from the principal perpetuates the cycle of aggression and presents the notion that authority figures are contributing to the problem of aggression indirectly rather than addressing the problem immediately and mediating with constructive problem-solving skills, thereby ameliorating the anti-social behaviour.

From the experiences of the participants, the pertinent argument underpinning the role of authority intervention in managing aggression and resolving conflict is: how do the authority figures deal with the aftermath of aggressive behaviour?

The participants’ responses to authority intervention from teachers and principals in managing aggression typifies ineffective social problem-solving strategies hence the perpetuation of the cycle of aggression within the school environment (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:539). Various explanations can be offered in attempting to understand the rationale for why authority figures did nothing about the aggressive incidents. Apart from the constitutional prohibition of corporal punishment, it seems as if the authority figures consider the aggressive problem as being trivial or there is an apathy or weariness in dealing with aggressive incidents as there is a lack of professional counselling and support, or perhaps the cycle of aggression “included a feeling of disempowerment” (Vally, et al., 2002:87). Moreover this can create situations which reinforce the aggressive behaviour.

In the absence of effort and strategic intervention by teachers and principals the cycle of aggression worsens. The participants are indirectly communicating through their responses on the intervention from authority by principals amongst others, that they expect aggressive incidents to be met with consequences. These consequences should be implemented by authority figures with the objective of remedying the problem and preventing future outbursts. Kauffman, et al., (1998:14) objectifies the above discussion by advocating that by ignoring the aggressive incidents or by doing nothing we do an injustice to society and “increase the likelihood of further aggression, maladjustment, and academic and social failure.”

The participants have experienced little control over spiralling aggressive incidents. Hence they have expressed the need for intervention by authority figures at school as a certain level of an external locus of control whereby teachers in responding to their need can assist them to manage or prevent aggressive behaviours. By expressing this need for an external locus of control, an important aspect of their capacity to self-regulate behaviour is revealed (Baron et al., 2009:370). Acknowledging that their capacity to self-regulate behaviour is not optimally functional implies their lack of necessary skills to deal with aggressive behaviours. Prevailing dangers and the consequences of aggressive behaviours and its impact on learners mental framework obviously bothers the participants and hence reflects the need for an external locus of control.
The participants’ experience on the role of intervention by authority figures in aggressive and conflict incidents is supported by Myburgh and Poggenpoel, (2007) and Botha (2006) which can be seen as the following: if the learners do not get guidance with regards to how to cope and manage aggression it creates a distrust towards teachers and learners’ school work will be negatively affected. Additionally it fosters an unsafe learning climate and also allows for a lack of discipline and an inconsistent application of discipline.

Furthermore the lack of purposeful and systematic intervention by authority contributes to and perpetuates the cycle of aggression at school. Additionally strategic intervention in aggressive experiences fosters an increase in the development of male learners’ hostile attributional biases in response to provocations and aggressive tendencies in school in the Intermediate Phase. The fight or flight instinct within perpetrator/victim interaction intensifies whilst genuine problem solving is obliterated. Support for this argument is maintained by McDevitt and Ormrod (2010:546), who advocate that if aggressive tendencies are not attended to effectively it will spiral to intense violence. Conversely aggression can be counteracted as authority figures are obligated in the role of acting in *loco parenthesiis* to create and cultivate a warm, inviting and nurturing environment, thereby serving as role models for learners to exhibit self-control, manage anger and frustration and communicate empathy and understanding. Smith, Lochman and Daunic (2005:227) stated the necessity for an “intensely calculated and collaborative response from all stakeholders” in dealing with the escalating problem of aggression which could result in positive outcomes and prevent adolescent aggression.

It seems that teachers rely on an external locus of control, namely, the principals, more often than not to deal with and manage learners’ aggression. Transferring the problem to principals without addressing and applying one’s personal repertoire of effective intervention strategies indicates perhaps, a teacher’s lack of skill and understanding of the complexity of the aggression problem. It is clear that the participants are aware that there is a lack of “quality guidance and reliability and reinforcement” which is implemented in schools to assist learners acquire acceptable behaviour (Smith, *et al.*, 2005).

4.2.2.2 Category 2: Male learners’ experience gangs and bullies as provocations for them to behave aggressively.

Some of the participants expressed worry and concern about gang activities. One of the main sources of aggression for learners in school is gang provocation. Gangs constantly
place participants on a path of conflict through bullying activities which often lead to the aggressive events. The responses below draws attention to the “gang” which some participants resort to in the form of aggressive behaviour.

“You see it was this other gang in grade, grade 5 and they was always bullying us. So we made our crew bigger and then the one boy started fighting with me and I hit him. That boy ran away and said more with the gang that bullies us.” (P1)

“The big boys are telling you too bunk school or smoke madam ... madam when I say no they will hit you.” (P10)

“They fight with you for no reason. They’ll start stealing your stuff in the class when you gone.” (P21)

Other participants voiced that “… the girls from grade 7 touch learners’ heads and say what are you going to do about it?”, “When I hit them they will say, they will call all of the girls and hit me.” (P6)

“The grade seven boys are bullying.” (P13)

The term ‘gang’ is regarded as a “cohesive social group characterized by initiation rites, distinctive colours and symbols, territorial orientation and criminal activity” (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:563). What is implicit in this definition are fundamentals of “criminal activity” and “feuds with rival groups” which essentially describe the participants’ experiences with gangs in school.

Participants who are victims and targets aggressed by gangs form gangs themselves as they react in response to a threat (Krahe, 2001:135). These gangs, comprising victims or targets exhibit aggression against their aggressors in self-defence. The participants express the need to protect themselves against these gangs. Hence the cycle of aggression continues as they form their own gangs whose behaviours also manifest in aggression.

Gangs consist of children who are older than some of the learners in school and it seems that the gang members take advantage of the fact that they are physically older perhaps and thus exert power and aggression over younger Intermediate Phase male learners. Gang members visualise themselves as having superiority over younger learners and hence engage in harassment, intimidation, threat, extortion and acts of bullying. The researcher is of the opinion that the bullying and aggressive behaviour of gangs creates a hostile and unfriendly environment for victims/targets.
Gangs pressurise Intermediate Phase male learners into doing things like ‘bunking’, “smoking”, “polishing” the shoes of the gang members which constitute intimidation and instrumental aggression. The participants indicated that when they do not comply with the orders of the gang they are subjected to physical aggression. The participant’s responses of “no” to these demands are met with threats revealing powerlessness and that the individuals do not have the capacity to deal with the gangs. By complying with the gangs demands the learners are putting themselves at a greater risk as they are not asserting their rights and enlisting the help of authority figures. According to Baron et al. (2009:364) exerting power and desiring to be part of a group are primary reasons for engaging in aggressive tactics (specifically in the Intermediate Phase).

A major part of the discussion focuses on gangs where the participants state that they form gangs as retaliation or defensive aggression against a gang consisting of senior male learners in school. This perception of differentiating between the gangs classifies the groups as ‘us versus them’ where the “emotional significance” is focussed on challenging aggressive senior male gangs rather than on establishing a traditional social identity (Baron et al., 2009:209). The participants show disapproval for the anti-social behaviours of the senior gangs. However the issue is not about how the other gangs facilitate aggression but on what you as a gang member are doing. This type of thinking reflects poor cognitive and perspective-taking skills and egocentricism.

“But I did feel sorry for ... but they did hit him. But I did not do anything.” (P4)

“I don’t know, because just like others and others like to fight and they forced. I didn’t know how to stop them.” (P4)

“He grabbed me and said ya (yes), now I got you! Everyone was pushing me away and saying go hit him, go hit him. And then I went to go hit him.” (P2)

“... like when that boy was fighting and he walked away. The other boy was laughing at him and teasing him. Because they think he’s scared of that person. That is why he doesn’t want to fight.” (P26)

The above responses of the participants describe the presence and affect other learners’ conduct during aggressive incidents. These aggressive incidents are witnessed by peers and other learners in and around the school environment. From the description given by the participants it is evident that the bystanders adopt different roles varying in support of the aggressors, or support of the victims or the lack of support for either. In keeping with the roles advocated by Lewis et al. (2004:44) bystanders during an aggressive incident adopt the role of:
• Assistant: A learner in school who helps the aggressor/perpetrator (however, no responses of the participants indicated this role of an assistant)

• Reinforcer: A learner who watches the aggressive incident and cheer, laugh and tease as one participant shared that they shout “fairgo, goerie” (fight). Another participant sharing his experience: “They tell you good boy, you hit him.” (P25)

• Defender: A learner who provides support for the victim/target of aggression, for example, “my friends tried to stop us (the fight) but they couldn’t.” (P25)

• Outsider: A learner who merely watches and does not get involved, for example, “I don’t know how to stop them.” (P4)

Bystanders adopt the role of the reinforcer, actually encouraging and provoking the aggressor to perpetuate acts of aggression by chanting “goerie” and “fairgo,” which means fight. Aggressors are enabled and motivated by the bystander’s chants such as “hit him” and this results in the fight or flight instinct and impacts the “escalation of the conflict” (Baron & Richardson, 1994:159). So bystanders/reinforcers incite the aggressors to intimidate, bully, harass and/or physically torment and injure the victim. The instigation or provocations by the reinforcers play a dual role. Firstly, the reinforcers verbally pressurize the perpetrators’ cognitive and affective frameworks in which a state of frustration, anger and situational tension is aroused. Secondly, the reinforcers are verbally expressing a threat of violence to the victim by saying to the aggressor “hit him” thus “making the aggressor mad enough to harass the target” (Wolk, 2010:3).

Additionally, if the perpetrator is a bully then his sense of his control and power is brought into question since he wants to depict himself as powerful, when in fact he asserts his powerlessness. According to Berkowitz (1993:67) “powerlessness can generate the urge of violence”. In attempting to maintain “one’s self-worth and significance” (Berkowitz, 1993:66) the aggressor who is impelled by his powerlessness, impulsively attacks his target/ victim. This powerlessness gives him the power to perform aggressively and in keeping with appearances he would exert his influence of superiority and power by being aggressive instead of rendering himself weak and powerless in the eyes of the bystanders.

Reinforcers encourage and endorse aggressive behaviours by chanting, teasing, laughing and making fun of the victims and targets. This can be viewed as a form of instrumental aggression as the reinforcers try to maintain “power and social status” (Berkowitz 1993:11). Reinforcers are exerting a strong influence on the perceptions of perpetrators of aggressive events. The fact that the participants accept or allow their peers to influence them in an issue
reveals that the reinforcers lack sensitivity, maturity and empathy as they encourage aggression at the victim’s expense. The role of reinforcers in aggressive incidents surpasses that of the role of assistants, defenders or outsiders. The reality of this conveys a truth that bystanders of male learners aggression in schools would prefer harm done to a victim (Baron & Richardson, 1994:161-162). They reinforce aggression in the perpetrator and contribute to the aggression cycle, whereas they should be demonstrating pro-social behaviours to curb aggression.

Significant is that the bystanders/reinforcers are generally the friends of the aggressors and victims. Friends who are not outsiders should have the courage and demonstrate responsibility to intervene and put an end to the aggressive incident (The researcher’s view). The verbal and non-verbal behaviours of the bystanders or specifically the reinforcers reveal the level of their morality which depends on the extent of their ‘moral integrity,’ ‘moral hypocrisy’ or ‘self interest’ (Baron et al., 2009:331).

There are bystanders who serve as defenders supporting/helping the victim in the aggressive situation. The defenders exemplify appropriate behaviour by helping, intervening, confronting and putting a stop to the aggressive incident, by verbally requesting the aggressor to stop fighting or by physically pulling the aggressor and the victim apart. Whilst the defender may intervene to stop the aggressive incident it is no guarantee that the victim may be protected from aggressive attacks. Nevertheless, the defender’s intervention provides a platform for ameliorating aggression and immediately communicates the idea that bullying will not be tolerated. Wolk (2010:4) contends that because bystanders do not like others being bullied, they, that is, the bystanders are psychologically affected and put into a state of “cognitive dissonance” when their inability to act in response to the aggressive incident does not match their internal code of moral reasoning (Baron et al., 2009:176). More often than not when one person acts in accordance with his internal moral code and intervenes in the aggressive incident, then other bystanders are more likely to follow suit (Baron & Richardson, 1994:58).

As one views the pro-social role of defenders, the nature of their character reflects care, consideration, perspective taking, conflict resolution and empathy. From the experiences shared by the participants on the defenders role, whilst the defenders exert effort and confidence to intervene their efforts sometimes are in vain as evident in the above responses of the participants. The perpetrator, so filled with fury, disregards the defenders pro-social advice and continues more avidly and intensely with his intent to harm the victim.

The varied accounts of the bystander affected by the participants surprisingly have no example reflecting the role of the assistant. Perhaps some bystanders do not engage in the role of physically assisting the aggressors attack and harm on the victim for fear of the
negative consequences of being harmed themselves, being punished by authority (teachers or principals) and becoming a target in future. This fear could possibly arise from the belief advocated by Wolk (2010:3) that “doing nothing will prevent them from being harassed.” Claims of participants such as “… not knowing how to stop them…” constitutes “pluralistic ignorance” (Baron et al., 2009:158) which is described as misunderstanding or misinterpreting others’ values or attitudes. Being vulnerable to risks prevents and inhibits bystanders from collaborating with the aggressors in physically harming the victim. One can conclude from the description of the role of reinforcers in the participants’ lived experiences of aggression that the bystander effect plays a significant role in contributing to the escalation and cycle of aggression. Baron and Richardson (1994:163) provide supporting evidence that bystanders can promote or hinder the aggression cycle pending on their “overt explicit actions.”

Most parts of the discussion about Intermediate Phase male learners’ experience of aggression in school centres mainly on the cognitive domains thus far. The emotional domain has been discussed to a slight extent in Theme One, where the experience of aggression equated to anger was more aptly discussed. A focussed view within the cycle of aggression also reveals emotions and feeling associated with fear and hurt which occurs in the aggressive interactions with other learners. An interesting fact is that whilst most of the aggressive incidents communicated information on anger as an expression of aggression and since emotions are “subjective experience of physiological arousal” (Long, 2007:56), which is not directly observable, participants have communicated through language and justified their emotions as:

“His brother punched me here and then I cry.” (P5) [Sadness]

“But I did feel sorry for X (names peer)” (P4) [Regret]

“After kicking the door, I felt ashamed.” (P3) [Embarrassment of guilt]

“I was feeling like I can’t fight. I can’t stand up for myself.” (P23) [Anxiety and distress]

“Maam, but I felt scared.” (P22) [Fear]

These quotations indicate a range of emotional responses which varies from participant to participant. These responses indicate the emotional distresses that the participants have experienced. Moreover it is interesting to note that the participants have the capacity to verbally express that they have feelings of sadness, regret, guilt, anxiety, distress and fear in contrast to the sex-role stereo-typed assumption that boys in general rarely show their
emotions as a result of biological, cultural, and societal practices and sanctions, for example “big boys don’t cry, hide your feelings, cheer up and be strong” (Long, 2007:58).

According to Long (2007:66), feeling sad and feeling scared in dealing with hurt could be considered unusual, unnatural or infantile ways of expressing anxiety for middle-childhood boys. These feelings also reflect that the boys are internally affected by the distress caused by aggressive incidents. One participant noted that his personal well-being at school would be affected if he were punished or as he (P22) states “they’re going to give me a transfer card.” These feelings are also typical for their age in that shame can be regarded as a self-conscious emotion (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:421).

By drawing on the Psychological Development Theory one learns that the stage of initiative versus guilt is applicable to 3 to 5 year old learners (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:407). A feeling of guilt incorporates the feeling of shame aptly relating to having unpleasant feelings from having behaved inappropriately. Feelings of shame imply that the learner is “aware of other people’s standards and behaviours” and that they are not meeting those standards (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:420). Being able to identify, and verbalize various feelings of fear, sadness and shame is quite desirable for the male participants even though society sometimes dictates which emotions to avoid just because they are boys.

Interviewer: “Why is it not okay for boys to act aggressively?”

Participant 13: “... because maam the boys are bullying the girls.”

Interviewer: “How are they bullying the girls?”

Participant 13: “Every time they taking money.” and “The grade 7 boys are taking the money.”

Participant 3: “I used to be quiet then people used to bully me a lot so when I got in grade 4 and I started changing coz then I said I can’t leave them to bully me anymore because I don’t like it now anymore because they hurt me.”

The next section below provides a discussion on the prevalence of bullying as aggression experienced by the participants. In exploring these experiences it becomes apparent that the participants assert themselves by adopting aggressive behaviours in response to and defence of the anti-social behaviours of bullies at school. It seems that they, by no fault of their own, have been indirectly and unintentionally positioned as aggressors in retaliation of senior bullies who have been the cause of their pain and distress. The participants have responded aggressively to the frustration caused by bullies instead of exercising restraint.
“Boys bullies polish our shoes with their hands. Ma’am they take our hands and polish their shoes.” (P22)

“You get to higher grades, then the bigger children start bullying you and then you must defend yourself. Then they can hurt sometimes badly.” (P3)

“They (reference to gangs) always were bullying the small children. They hit us and say thank you.” (P1)

From a Social Learning Theory perspective the presence of bullies in the school environment serves as a negative role model influencing the aggressive tendencies of learners in schools. Through observational learning and imitative aggression modelling, the participants therefore have acquired, develop and maintain patterns of aggressive behaviours (Fiske, 2010:405-406). The tendency that children who observe and imitate aggressive models, exhibit “greater-than-average aggression” and has been found in studies where the aggressive behaviour of learners is reinforced as they seek revenge in defence of their well-being (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:535). Whilst the participants perceive that their aggressive behaviours towards bullies are primarily beneficial to them, they do not consider the ramifications of their aggressive intentions. Fiske’s (2010:401) description of control as a core social motive of aggression can be viewed from the participant’s experience as a “response to perceived threat”, an “impulse to protect” and it “coerces the potential perpetrator to prevent or cease” doing harm.

Participant 3: “I can’t leave them to bully anymore because I don’t like it now anymore, because they can hurt me.”

Participant 4: “Uh, when I was in grade three I didn’t fight. I didn’t fight but now I like to fight. I don’t like to read. I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I like to fight. I like to bully. Too much now ... At home I bully my friends. Maybe I’m playing but in the park. I ... people.”

Interviewer: “How do you bully the people?”

Participant 5: “Sometimes when I’m hungry I take their food.”

Whilst making conscious decisions to react to the provocation, the participant engages in pro-active aggression which is a “deliberate aggression against” the bully as means of achieving revenge (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:538). According to McDevitt & Ormrod (2010: 538) pro-active aggressors may find it challenging to maintain interpersonal relationships. This account of bullying is a typical example of aggression breeding aggression.
According to McDevitt and Ormrod (2010:539) bullies hold beliefs about the appropriateness and effectiveness of aggression. In the accounts where the participants want to defend themselves against bullies, their actions of counter-aggression stems from their belief that they are teaching the bullies a lesson. By retaliating with aggression these learners have formed the belief that aggression is an appropriate way to resolve the bullying problem. Whatever forms of aggression the participants adopt in defensive aggression, the consequences thereof will be social rejection from others (Fiske, 2010:391).

4.2.2.3 Category 3: Gender identity and gender roles

Whilst the primary aim of this study was to explore and describe male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase, the questions “Could you define a boy or say what a boy is to someone who has never met or known a before, say perhaps to an alien?” adapted from (Frosh et al., 2002: 275) rephrased as “What do you understand by the word boy?” necessitated the participants’ conceptualisation of gender identity and gender roles with the possibility of gleaning information of their perceptions of masculinity traits in the experience of aggression or aggressive behaviour in school. In keeping with the discussion of gender identity and gender roles this question provided data which highlighted gender differences which were tabulated as per Table 4.2. The participants commented mainly on what boys do, what boys like and how they differed from girls. The idea for Table 4.2 was inspired from Warren (2000:126) example of gendered perceptions elicitation exercise. Table 4.2 indicates the participants’ responses which are categorised as physical attributes associated with gender, verbal attributes associated with gender, appearance associated with gender and interests associated with gender.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTRIBUTES</th>
<th>STATEMENTS MADE BY THE PARTICIPANTS ABOUT BOYS</th>
<th>STATEMENTS MADE BY PARTICIPANTS ABOUT GIRLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### 3. Interests associated with gender

| Boys like soccer, sport and action movie." (P20) |
| Boys like playing soccer, like fighting, playing play station, racing games." (P25) |
| A boy likes to play cricket, soccer." (P15) |
| [Boys] play soccer, basketball, ride bike." (P17) |
| [Boys] watch soccer, Van Damme movies." (P17) |
| A boy likes cars." (P1,P9) |
| [Boys] doesn’t play with dolls." (P1) |
| Boys play cricket and girls can’t play cricket." (P26) |
| They [boys] like to play and fix bicycles." (P1) |
| A boy is work hard." (P11) |
| Boys can clean gardens." (P26) |
| Boys like soccer, sport, wrestling." (P21) |
| Girls like Barbie dolls and to play and not fight." (P21) |
| Girls like to talk, Barbie dolls and cartoons on TV." (P9) |
| Girls can’t be presidents, boys can be. Girls can’t play basketball but boys can." (P26) |
| Girls clean houses." (P28) |
| Girls can’t work with tools." (P26) |

### 4. Appearances associated with gender

| Boys wear long trouser." (P7) |
| Boys wear trousers." (P15) |
| Boys have short hair." (P20) |
| Girls wear short skirts." (P7) |
| Females have long hair." (P20) |
The above Table 4.2 illustrates broad gender differences in the way the participants perceive themselves as boys from their counterparts. From the perspectives of the participants, gender has been classified as two separate entities. Their account of gender differences is established in particular in terms of abilities of what a boy can do and what a girl can do in and appearance in terms of what a girl or boy should look like. Many of their statements indicate that their belief stems from the fact that children have learnt and acquired roles in relation to what is desirable for their sex. Being male or female is highlighted by the Sex Role Socialization Theory (MacNaughton, 2006:128). According to the Sex Role Socialization Theory gender roles are socially learnt and “classified as gender stereotypes,” which occurs through observation, imitation and modelling from family members, peers, the school environment and media. The effect of gender stereotypes as evident in the gender differences labelled by the participants according to theorists of Sex-Role Socialization Theory causes children to think and act in sexist ways (MacNaughton, 2006:129). Examining the gender differences as provided in Table 4.2, from a feminist post-structuralist (Francis, 2006:10) view, which advocates that gender is relational and socially constructed and they are not separate but overlapping entities and traditional sex-typed behaviours linked with pleasure, it is easy to ascertain that the participants classification of distinctive gender differences of masculine and feminine are proof of sex-roles which are culturally bound. Furthermore the pleasure principle is evident in the words “boys like” and “boys can” (MacNaughton, 2006:130). This train of thought emanates from “power and discourse” which advocates how a boy or girl should think and act (MacNaughton, 2006:131).

It was also clear that participants never mentioned collaborative play or collaborative learning between the genders in school. Clearly evidenced is the notion that the participants engage mainly in physical activities such as soccer, racing, playing basketball and cricket reflecting “gender typed” characterizing “competitive and rough and tumble play” (Papalia et al., 2010:398).

Posing this question: “What does the word boy mean?” was an integral part through which the participant could share their identities and relationships thereby allowing the researcher to gauge characteristics of a “dominant form of masculinity” (Frosh et al., 2002:75). The researcher was particularly interested in the participants’ perceptions of themselves as boys without intending to extend the interest to girls. Some of the participants spontaneously shared their experiences from a position of themselves in relation to girls.

The verbatim quotations reflected in the Table 4.2 seem to show polarised relationships between boys and girls which aptly can be described as “marked by differences” (Frosh et al., 2002:99). It is important to note that even though the emancipation of women and the
pursuit of gender equity in every sector of society in most parts of the world has positioned women into non-traditional roles, male participants between the ages of 9 and 11 share information on the difference between boys and girls from a traditional “fixed” and “self-contained way” (Frosh et al., 2002:99). Arguably even though research studies have challenged the existing notion and assumptions of traditional gender stereotypes, the male participants have perpetuated boys and girls as different, where in reality gender is relational and there are similarities with “some ways to be masculine overlapping some ways to be feminine” (MacNaughton, 2006:127).

Some of the sex roles regarding gender differences enlisted in Table 4.2 indicate “biases against” girls and it also reveals a limited understanding of relational gender (MacNaughton, 2006;129). Apart from addressing the fact that views of gendered differentiation from girls, which so clearly constitutes social exclusion, the boys have taken it for granted that in assuming that girls are “sweeter” than them, “girls don’t fight” and “don’t play soccer.” It reveals poor perspective taking socially related to their development level. This assumption basically imply a lack of recognition for girls and their abilities, choosing to assert themselves as stronger and rougher, but does not inhibit them from exhibiting aggression towards girls.

This category has highlighted the participants’ understanding of gender identity and gender roles, a differentiation which homogenised boys as physically tough and strong, and engaging in physical activities. An underpinning for understanding gendered differentiation is that socialisation (Sex-Role Socialisation Theory) has encouraged their learning to behave as boys and it predisposes them to aggressive behaviour.

4.2.3 THEME 3: Male learners in the Intermediate Phase make suggestions in managing their own and others’ aggression in school.

The participants provided suggestions on how they could manage aggression as their responses implied non-retaliation, refrain from getting angry, not getting even when you are wronged, which are usually the responses to provocation. The participants suggested appropriate ways to respond to aggression instead of retaliation:

“Walk away from fights, tell the principal .... don’t hit them back.” (P26)

“Walking away; walking away from fights and all that.” (P25)

“Ma’am they must just ignore them.” (P23)
“Walk away or report to the teacher.” (P7)

“They [boys] must calm down and think about their actions.” (P9)

“They [boys] must go to the office, tell someone so they can sort him out.” (P12)

“If they [boys] see, maybe a friend fighting with another boy, then the prefect must come and stop it, another person must come, must be a lot of them stopping the fight.” (P1)

The above suggestions indicate that one can associate these suggestions to self-regulation, maintaining one’s composure and, as Drew (2004:25) suggests, “choosing a path of courage, firmness and dignity.” This suggestion also applied to the victim - it implies that instead of exhibiting reactive aggression, the victim needs to assert himself and seek out assistance from an authority figure or exercise self-assertion through verbal reprimand or self-regulation by walking away and showing self-restraint. Whether the peer mediates to ameliorate aggression or whether the victim seeks intervention via external locus of control, the desire to seek an intervention reflects a capacity for protecting one’s wellbeing and preserving one’s rights. This pro-social behaviour also indicates the ability to take perspectives and demonstrate empathy (Drew, 2004).

Linking these suggestions to middle-childhood developmental levels, these suggestions to some degree reflect the participants’ moral reasoning which depends on their cognitive development. Reflecting on Theme One where the moral development of the participant showed a low level of moral reasoning, these participants’ suggestions listed above may not necessarily support that conclusion. To some extent these suggestions indicate a conventional level of reasoning. Hence the question arises, why the participants suggest such seemingly appropriate ways to deal with or manage their own and others aggressive behaviour, but have difficulty implementing their own advice. The suggestions by the participants illustrate a slight level of logical thinking, it does not necessarily reflect reality but an opinion as their “reasoning is based on hunches and intuition” (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:201). McDevitt and Ormrod (2010:524) implicitly state that “cognitive development does not guarantee moral development.” In other words whilst it may seem to be easy for the participants to think realistically about managing aggression, they nevertheless still function in a “self centred pre-conventional” level (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:524).

Another suggestion by the participants in managing aggression pertains to morality and religion. Some participants proposed that aggressors will less likely engage in aggressive behaviour when they seek God. This view is acceptable to a certain extent as most religions
and philosophical teachings advocate universal values and attitudes of truth, empathy, love and forgiveness (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:525). Some of the participants hold the belief that attending church and praying is an important factor in managing aggression. The second participant’s view builds on the first interview, in which church attendance will impact positively on the person’s thinking process.

“I want to go in church, to pray, to God ...” (P5)

“I want to tell him [God] the other boys want to hit me you see!” (P14)

“Their mind will change if they [boys] go to church.” (P11)

Experiences noted by the participants embody “qualitative changes” reflecting a transition to “higher mental functions” (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:211) which indicates a combination of Piaget’s (1953) and Vygotsky’s (1978) theories of cognitive development. Vygotsky in particular held the perspective in his Social Cultural Theory that social and cultural factors equip a child with the cognitive tools to mediate learning. One can assume that the participants, who through their numerous interactions with “... go to church” (their social and cultural environment) has acquired learning experiences which they have transformed and adapted through “internalisation” and “appropriation” (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:213).

In support of the preceding discussion McDevitt and Ormrod (2010:525) state that a religious (non-terrorist and non-supremacist) or philosophical stance to life has an important effect on children’s moral development. However these religious beliefs may influence the participants’ moral reasoning in terms of children developing and acquiring selfless values like care for others. Waker and Ramer (2006)) maintain that religion does not translate into moral reasoning. Imposing terms and conditions in his request to God reflect egocentricism, lack of empathy and moral development aimed at justice and competition (Delfos, 2004:493). Due to a lack of insight and empathy some participants do not realize that their behaviour could be the cause of the other person’s behaviour. The suggestions offered by the participants show a connection to egocentric thinking, moral development and poor perspectives taking.

“They can think.”(P11)

“They must calm down and think about their actions.” (P1)

The above quotations illustrate effective strategies which may assist the aggressor to deal with their own aggression. The above suggestions are in keeping with self-regulation, self control, self-talk and exercising restraint. Self-regulation overlapping emotional regulation is
an important aspect that entails “controlling ones actions and emotions” (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:504) and encompasses the capacity to:

- resist anti-social behaviour;
- regulate emotions to produce acceptable and affective conditions;
- to form beliefs and uphold society’s standards of conduct;
- strive for values;
- self motivation; and
- regulate learning.

To be able to self-regulate requires thinking about consequences of one’s actions as well as why one should not follow a particular course of action. Moreover self-regulation is also influenced by emotional autonomy (Papalia et al., 2010:234).

The suggestions offered by the participants show links to their developmental levels of egocentric thinking, a preconventional level of moral development and poor perspectives taking. As discussed in the conceptual and theoretical framework, middle-childhood male learners exhibiting the above responses have a “limited-me-other” differentiation (Delfos, 2004:94).

In summary the suggestions made by the participants indicate that it is clear that the Intermediate Phase male learners are in need of guidelines that could assist them to cope with and manage aggression constructively.

Since the second aim of this research study is to explore and describe the influence of masculinity perspectives on the experiences of Intermediate Phase male learners’ experiences of aggression, the following section will address the effects of masculinity on male learners’ experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase.

4.3 THE EFFECTS OF MASCULINITY ON MALE LEARNERS’ EXPERIENCE OF AGGRESSION IN SCHOOL DURING THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE

As mentioned above, the second aim of this research investigation was to explore and describe the experiences of masculinity on the experiences of Intermediate Phase male learners’ experience of aggression.
Throughout the ages the violence and aggressive behaviour propagated by men has always been associated with masculinities (Francis, 2006:14). This section is not focused on the presumption that male learners are aggressive because of their gender roles or because they have an innate propensity to aggress, but how different factors influence how male learners perceive themselves and how this contributes to their interrelationships (Kahn, 2009:22; Francis, 2006:11; Franklin, 1984:51; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997:207). Moreover this section seeks to elucidate Intermediate Phase male learner's experiences of aggression in relation to masculinity and the ways in which the phenomenon of masculinities contribute to the experience of aggression.

Since masculinity is a “hypothetical construct” that cannot be “directly observed or measured” and since there is no scientific consensus on whether masculinity pertains to scientific behaviours, characteristics or psychological and social experiences, what counts as masculinity is a pertinent question (Kahn, 2009: 2-3; Franklin, 1984:4-12). The researcher adopted the definition of masculinity which is a negotiation of “cognitive, behavioural, emotional expressive, psychosocial and socio-cultural experiences” in relation to male (Kahn, 2009:2). In order to understand Intermediate Phase male learners’ experiences of aggression mirrored against a masculinity perspective, the researcher draws on the participants’ articulated, lived experiences as well as their ideological opinions offered in the semi-structured interviews.

From the outset it was necessary to first establish that various social contacts and relations influence learner’s experiences of aggression. According to Kahn (2009:22) “social structures” promulgate a framework of rules and regulations which governs a social institution. Hence the school, family, friends and mass media, amongst others, are social institutions [places] that determine and regulate the “social structures” which Intermediate Phase male learners are subjected to (Kahn, 2009:22; Franklin, 1984:42; Connell, 2006:21; Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007:91). Patriarchy as discussed in Chapter Two is one form of social structure that has a “male-dominated, male-identified and male-centred culture” (Kahn, 2009:23). Turning to the experiences of the male participants, all three schools were male dominated with males serving as principals of the school. Furthermore the participants have described males as “strong”; “tough” and have “power” which provides advocacy for male identification. The patriarchal culture of male centredness is evidenced as many participants are exposed to the media, that is, watching wrestling, playing play station and watching soccer which portrays “men as active people” occupying a centre stage for their physical prowess and popularity. Section 4.2.2.4 on gender differences of the participants indicated gender association with gender on a physical and verbal level as well as male appearances and male interests, and glamorises the activities of men. The male participants
strongly associated their gender (male) with sport and this argument is supported by the boys conversation (Frank, 1996:116) who states that “men act in ways that produce masculinity... that’s what sport is about,” which aptly captures male participants’ ideas of gender and masculinity as it is situated in sport. Additionally the organization of sport, which accentuates competition, rivalry, achievement and physical fitness, perpetuates the aggressive aspects of masculinity which is presented extensively by mass media (Connell, 2006:22; Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007:181).

It is important to state that apart from the one question in the interview schedule which requested the participants to explain their understanding of what it meant to be a boy, the following discussion on masculinity arises from the participants’ experience of aggression. The question that arises from this mindset is: “How do they make sense of masculinity within the context of aggression?”

Privilege and entitlement, which are components of a patriarchal culture in masculinity, is evident when boys describe their interests, for example, “they do hard things”; “a man can fight” and “they are rough” as the way things are and exist in society (Kahn, 2009:29; Connell, 2006:21) meaning that this is an established norm and something taken for granted. In advocating their own interests and their practice of hegemonic masculinity, Intermediate Phase male learners are unconsciously stating that they have the privilege of “going to the park” and “playing soccer” over girls who are supposedly “watching cartoons” and who “play with dolls.” Whilst it is not an absolute certainty, the “privilege” and “entitlement” relation exists in the participant’s experience of being masculine. The privilege that one participant subscribes to is the privilege men have over women and the subordination of women as stated in the example “boys can be presidents, but not girls.” To add emphasis to the nature of a patriarchal culture, hegemonic masculinity explains the connection between patriarchy and privilege. People act in ways that reinforce male privilege by supporting conformity to an idealized version of masculinity though it may not be in their best interest (Kahn, 2009:31). Frank (1996:120) adds that this social privilege is derived from power that is “worked on” and “played out.” An important application which underpins hegemonic masculinity is that it functions on the parameters of “coaxing” instead of pressurising people to conform to prescribed societal norms and behavioural standards (Kahn, 2009:31).

The quotation below shows how participants are coaxed into acquiring the hegemonic form of masculinity and how social and structural factors play a key role by means of observation, imitation and social modelling through which boys learn masculine roles.

“They learn from other boys from high school or this school.” (P11)
“They learn to fight from the street.” (P13)

In consideration of the social context, hegemonic masculinity characterising gendered power relations is functioning in the lives of Intermediate Phase male learners in school, in the classroom, in the playground where boys tease and harass girls representing dominance and subordination (Kahn, 2009:32; MacNaughton, 2006:133; Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007:99). Parents also promote hegemonic ideals in the social and cultural environment as evidenced by the example in the following interview extract.

“From their parents. From their fathers mostly cos like for example, Michael Jackson. He stood up to himself just because children used to make fun of him and his father was a fighter and his father taught him how to fight and to stand up for himself.” (P20)

The range of aggressive behaviours from name calling such as “big ears”, “tsotsi” to “kicking,” “punching,” “swearing,” and “threatening” which some the participants have alluded to, conforms to engaging in behaviours of “real men” (Kahn, 2009:32; Franklin, 1984:8; Kenway & Fitz Clarence, 1997:207). Hegemonic masculinity subtly and unobtrusively exerts its influence into Intermediate Phase male learners’ repertoire of behaviours thereby coaxing middle-childhood boys to conform to the norm (Kahn, 2009:32) of being masculine. Moreover Frank (1996:120) maintains that name-calling and the physical and mental abuse of others does not emanate from ones attitudes but is perpetuated and permeated through an exposure of “expert sources” such as parents, teachers, friends and their heroes.

Dominant masculinity is a component of hegemonic masculinity features in western society as toughness, competition, aggressiveness and power symbolic of male centred patriarchy (Frosh et al., 2002:75). This dominant masculinity is acculturated through religious, educational and family societal structures as well as “televised sports manhood formula” (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007:181). In addition this idealized dominant masculinity is presented in movies such as Superman, Batman, WWE wrestling and in Music by 50 Cent (Kahn, 2009:33).

In several instances the participants responses were indicative of aspiring to the idealized form of dominant masculinity discussed in the preceding paragraph. Exposure to imagery of an idealized dominant masculinity paves the way for learners to acquire and model this form of hegemonic masculinity as the “way men are” (Kahn, 2009:33) or “what it is to be a man” (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007:181). A number participants shared information on wrestling, watching video games indicative of male centred culture and a dominant masculinity ideal as shared in the quotations below:
“Boys like soccer, like fighting, playing play station, racing games ... wrestling.” (P20)

“... uh, (playing) aggressive games. God of War (name of game).” (P25)

“When they look in the movies they see you can fight like this, let’s start with other children.”[P11]

The wrestlers, movie stars, and sports heroes symbolise dominant masculinity as they have access to wealth, fame, popularity, privilege and entitlement. The participants fulfil a role of “complicit masculinity” by contributing to dominant masculinity via their support and hero worship (Kahn, 2009:35). In addition the attributes of ‘competitiveness in a dominant form of masculinity correlates with the “competition and justice” phenomenon described by Delfos (2004), which is also known as Erikson’s (1963-1972) period of “industry versus inferiority.” Apart from subscribing to complicit masculinity via idolising and emulating media heroes, participants also acquire aggressive scripts from direct imitation and an increase in aggressive responses manifested in other forms as discussed in Chapter Two.

With reference to the identity and gender roles discussed, Section 4.2.2.3 illustrates an externally complicit hegemonic masculinity as indicated by the participants who maintained that girls were incapable of playing soccer and becoming the president. The sentiments of espousing to power and privilege referred to as “advantages” by Franklin (1984:12) is similar to Kahn (2009:37) where dominant males in her class of masculinity espoused statements of women being incapable of playing sports or succeeding in business which is ‘politically incorrect’. Frosh et al. (2002:100) and Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007:181) similarly draws on boys subjective comments on women’s displacement in sport. This example is analogous of some of the participants’ responses which reflect an externally complicit masculinity.

Whilst some of the participants maintained gender differences with girls, these assumptions are not entirely valid and accurate as there are also boys who do not prefer soccer or other types of so called “dominant” masculine sport. Kahn (2009:50) contends that this type of reasoning is referred to as “prescriptive” or “socio cultural norms” where individuals hold the belief of what they think men should do rather than what they actually do, which is known as descriptive norms. In essence Intermediate Phase male learners identify all boys as uniquely and universally aligned to the prescriptive norms of experiencing masculine ideals. Kahn (2009:50) also advocates that prescriptive norms can be harmful to a boy who subscribes to the assumption that all boys can achieve sporting prowess.
In terms of resisting patriarchy and deviating from the prescriptive norms and dominant attitudes only one learner offered the following response: “My mother told me not to hit girls.” Whilst this response reflects a developmental level of preconventional morality it also reflects a socio-cultural norm emanating from his mother who represents a feminist ideology.

Participants also assigned the attributes of “tough”; “strong”; “rough”; and “hard” to boys in their discussion of aggressive incidents. The frequency of these descriptions communicates “masculinity scripts” that boys have acquired through their cultural and social interactions (Kahn, 2009: 216). Similar to the process of cognitive scripts, boys develop gender roles in keeping with this masculinity script otherwise known as a boy code or masculinity code (Fiske, 2010:407; Krahe, 2001:112; Kahn, 2009:271). This code is a type of blueprint for masculinity which regulates the way a boy should feel, think and behave.

Kahn (2009:54) advocates that gender roles resulted as society categorically created assumptions about global differences for the roles and expectations of men from that of women. An example of this is the “Blueprint for Manhood” gender role model which assigns the description of “No Sissy stuff” as a benchmark for men to distance themselves from what women do and hence create as such an exclusive only men’s group (Kahn, 2009:6). Evidence for this type of thinking was illustrated once again by the participants, in Table 4.2 of gender differences explored in Section 4.2.2.3.

Intermediate Phase male learners exert dominance and power by bullying other learners and being part of destructive gang activities. They keep their emotions in check whilst they engage in aggressive incidents. They appear to be self-reliant, strong and independent when they assess an aggressive situation where they have been wronged and then think they can draw the line by showing their power by retaliating. As a result of this they hamper their interrelationships with peers. Finally male learners demonstrate courage and risk taking as perpetrators of aggression who engage in hostile aggression. This is exemplified by swearing, extorting, provoking, hitting, punching as well as engaging in instrumental aggression for the purpose of acquiring a desired goal or incentives which is accomplished at the risk of losing friends and being punished by authority.

The above account demonstrates how the participant’s response reflects an attribute of power to his positioning of masculinity.

Interviewer: Why is it okay for boys to act aggressively?”

Participant 11: “because boys have power madam.”

Interviewer: “Where do they get this power from?”
Participant 11: “From playing soccer.”

This “power” obviously does not denote holding power literally in the sense of being a leader but figuratively signifies power in relation to being strong. Even though this simplistic rendition reflects a pre-operational and pre-conventional thought process, if one reads between the lines, the phrase “boys have power” reflects a socio-cultural norm pertaining to the sporting prowess that boys should have. Furthermore the participant justifies that because boys have power or strength they qualify or earn the privilege to act aggressively. The participant thus holds the assumption that playing soccer provides the access to the social privilege of acquiring power (Frosh et al., 2002:52-53).

From a masculinity perspective the above argument that boys should develop power does constitute a hegemonic ideal. What is interesting about this power ideal is that whilst men occupy positions of power, they do not conceptualise it as owning power (Kahn, 2009:69). Conversely this conceptualisation of holding of power emanates and resonates from a feminist view with being designated as outsiders or from being marginalized (Kahn, 2009:67-69; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:642).

Bullying has occupied a prevalent position in many of the participants’ experiences of aggression in school in which they were victims of bullying or they were the bullies themselves, as discussed in Theme Two Category Two. Studies by Liang, Flisher and Lombard (2007:161) revealed that bullying was perpetrated by male learners and that they have an inclination for excessive and extreme aggression which, according to Kahn (2009:180), is a form hyper-masculinity characterised by the attributes of a dominant masculinity. A study on the role of masculinity in children’s bullying (Gini & Pozzoli, 2006:586) had relevance to this research study in that bullying could occur as result of the “masculine emphasis of self-affirmation and social dominance” which was evident in the participants’ verbal and physical forms of aggression. Reactive aggression which regularly characterised the victims’ behaviour also endorses principles of power, risk taking and control. Other attributes included egocentricism and the lack of perspective taking. Egocentricism has already been discussed in Theme One where Intermediate Phase male learners who aggress, function at a pre-operational stage in their development and experience difficulty in viewing issues from other people’s perspectives. Those participants, who harass, threaten, extort, and physically abuse other learners exhibit the form of hyper-masculinity.

In Theme Two Category Two the emotions experienced by some participants described as “wanting to cry,” “feeling bad,” “feeling pain,” and “feeling shame,” which was discussed as a normal and acceptable trend for middle-childhood boys but not always socially sanctioned by
parents or adults, can be linked to research which indicates that a difference in the size of the corpus callosum in the left hemisphere of a boy hinders his ability to express thoughts and feelings into words (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:425; Delfos, 2004:76). From a masculinity perspective this limited emotional ability could be perceived as boys conforming to a ‘boy’ or ‘masculinity’ code as contended, which constrains their ability to express their internalised feelings of pain, guilt and fear (Kahn, 2009; Franklin, 1984:13; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:641). Furthermore expressing these emotions may be regarded as whimpish, girlish or sissy-like. From a theoretical perspective denying one’s emotions is connected to “male-relational dread” which pertains to experiencing difficulty in extending oneself to others relationally (Kahn, 2009:217). This inability also hinders expressing empathy, communication and connecting. From a psycho-dynamic model of masculinity, the separation of boys from their mothers is known as gender trauma. Gender trauma occurs at a significant time in the boy’s lives when they are supposed to learn skills of communication and empathy from their mothers. Thus the trauma experienced by the boys enables them to form defensive armour by which they protect themselves from pain and hurt (Kahn, 2009:126). Evidently it makes sense why boys often describe themselves in terms of what they can do rather than describing their relationships with others from an affective perspective.

There is ample evidence from the participants’ experiences of aggression to suggest that there is an influence of social and cultural phenomena, namely viewed as a dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity. Middle-childhood boys acquire and subscribe to prescriptive and descriptive norms of masculine expectations defined by society. In other words middle-childhood boys are acculturated that is, they adjust and position themselves within a masculinity form (Frosh et al., 2002:1). The manifestation of aggressive behaviours, including bullying, is reinforced through environmental stimuli, conditioning, and modelling. Reflecting on the aggressive experiences of the participants through the lens of the masculinity perspectives there is evidence to suggest that the aggressive experiences draw from a dominant form of masculinity which influences the boys’ cognitive processes, especially on how they should feel, think and act. This dominant form of masculinity is associated with the different attributes of being rough, tough, hard, and strong, and is synonymous with competiveness, patriarchy, power, privilege, egocentricism, emotional detachment. The gender differences whereby the participants maintained a distancing from femininity also highlights prescriptive norms for boys and also succinctly advocates the propagation of a patriarchy which is male centred. In conclusion the effects of masculinity on the experience of aggression indicate a subtle influence which may be explained by the participants’ exertion of power, control, privilege and dominance in their interactions with both males and females.
4.4 SUMMARY

Chapter Four described the main themes and categories pertaining to male learners’ experience of aggression in schools during the Intermediate Phase that emanated from the semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interviews.

Theme One described the participants’ experience of aggression in school, translating into concrete examples. Theme Two focusing on the cycle of aggression as well as the role of authority and relationships in managing aggression, which was divided into four categories, namely, the cycle of aggression, the role of authority in the management of aggression and resolution of conflict, and the role of relationships and gender identity and gender roles. The final theme dealt with the recommendations made by Intermediate Phase male learners on dealing with and managing aggression. In concluding Chapter Four, the male learners' lived experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase were examined in relation to masculinity perspectives.

The following chapter gives attention to the conclusions of the research study, presents a description of the field notes drawn from the research, describes guidelines emanating from the data findings of this study to equip male learners with skills to cope with and manage aggression in school constructively, states the recommendations based on the findings of this study and indicates the limitations of the study.


CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS, GUIDELINES, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this study was to explore and describe male learners’ experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase and to examine the findings of the study against masculinity perspectives. The rationale and purpose of this study which provided the impetus for the research question formed the springboard for a conceptual and theoretical framework, and literature advocacy, and the selection of the research design and methodology. The corpus of data was analysed for the interpretation of pertinent themes and categories.

This chapter provides a synopsis of the findings discussed in Chapter four, highlights guidelines and recommendations that could assist in ameliorating Intermediate Phase male learner’s aggression in primary schools and sets out the limitations of this study.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

As this research study focused on male learner’s experience of aggression, the phenomenon of aggression was explored and described and supported theoretically by literature as a goal-directed behaviour with the intent to injure or harm someone who is motivated to resist the attack (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Botha, 2012). The results of this research study raised key themes and a variety of issues about male learners’ experiences of aggression arising from data gathered in interviews.

Data from the male learner’s experiences, perceptions and thoughts on aggression translated into concrete experiences and low levels of moral reasoning which reflected their developmental levels of cognitive thinking on a pre-operational level, a pre-conventional stage of moral development and focused on “justice and competition,” described as Erikson’s period of industry versus inferiority (Delfos, 2004). This trend was inextricably woven into all of the data gathered in the interviews.
Theme one described learners’ experience of aggression on a concrete level which aligned to Piaget’s pre-operational stage of cognitive development appropriate for early childhood learners. A number of participants described their experience of aggression as fighting and a means at getting back at someone. The aggression experiences of Intermediate Phase male learners runs congruent to the theoretical definition maintained by Baron and Richardson (1994) and Fiske (2010) which is goal-directed behaviour with the immediate intent to harm and injure a victim who resists the attack.

The aggressive behaviour of learners manifested in varying forms of hostile and instrumental aggression. The learners maintained that the emotion of anger impelled the need to aggress. Responses from the learners indicated the intensity of the anger effect. The moral reasoning of learners also reveals a low pre conventional level as learners could not justify why they aggress. Learners frequently misattribute the cause of aggression to an external locus of control due to a hostile attributional bias. This fundamental attribution reflects egocentrism and poor perspective taking. This raises a concern as one can infer that the learners have poor abilities to control their emotions and to self-regulate their behaviour. Whilst it seems to be natural for individuals to experience anger, learners need to know how to aggress and also when to aggress without incurring negative consequences (Fiske, 2010). The implications are that “cognitive techniques” (Baron & Richardson, 1994:333) or interventions should be implemented to get learners to change their “aggressive scripts” into “assertive scripts” (Krahe, 2001).

Another established feature is the cycle of aggression which permeates many experiences of aggression. This cycle of aggression indicates the “interactive process” between the perpetrator and the victim/target (Baron & Richardson, 1994:143). Triggers for aggression, amongst others, are verbal provocation as the antecedent of aggressive behaviours manifesting as retaliatory and defensive aggression. The escalation of aggressive behaviours within this cycle of aggression necessitates the need for authority intervention, which is ineffective as indicated by the participants at schools. It must be emphasised that the manner in which authority manages conflict and aggression provides the platform for learners to model and replicate the same behaviour. The implications for education and research are the role of authority intervention in middle-childhood aggression.

Physical activity and social interaction depicting a period of ‘industry versus inferiority’ (Papalia et al., 2010:380) are central developmental milestones for middle childhood. It seems however that this period in the lives of Intermediate Phase male learners is marked by gang and bullying activities. A number of these learners
reported on the aggressive activities of bullies, which was mainly characterised by instrumental aggression. The bullies play a dual role as they are initially victims of bullies, who then transform into bullies to reciprocate the attack of the bullies by using defensive aggression. In essence the bullies, who are powerless, exert power (Berkowitz, 1993) over the weak and vulnerable, the “less confident and defenceless” (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:538), and use instrumental aggression to gratify their egocentric desires.

A significant association between the bystander effects an aggression was evident where learners adopted either a role of a reinforcer or that of a defender. Reinforcers facilitated an escalation of aggression by cheering, encouraging and urging the perpetrator through the chanting of “goerie” and “fairgo,” which means fight. Other learners as defenders of the victims influence a de-escalation of aggression by mediating in the fight.

Whilst most of this research study focused significance on Intermediate Phase male learners’ experience of aggression, the conduct and roles of girls’ are brought into comparison when the participants advocate differences between the genders. Intermediate Phase male learners held similar beliefs and assumptions about the relational differences between the genders which was “marked by difference” (Frosh et al., 2002). Gender power relations was evident in their description of boys being active, possessing sporting prowess, being physically strong, hard and tough, having the privilege of being presidents and “swear and fight.” The fight-and-flight instinct became apparent in the gender differences for boys whilst girls were associated with the tend-and-befriend perception evidenced by the participants’ responses (Fiske, 2010; Richardson & Hammock, 2007).

Religion, morality, self-control and self-regulation were the suggestions presented by the male learners as ways to manage aggression. These suggestions indicate a transition to higher cognitive processes and suggest having autonomy for curbing impulsivity. However, looking back at the data trail male learners in school have experienced difficulty in controlling their aggressive behaviours. Whilst many of them advocate praying to God to manage aggression, their requests turn out be self-serving as they request “God to tell them not to hit me.”

In approaching the aim of the effects of masculinity on aggression, the male learners’ manifestation of concrete examples of aggression and their ideological views on issues of power, privilege and advantage over their counterparts indicate an acculturation of social and cultural prescriptive and descriptive norms of masculinity. The findings clearly indicate that Intermediate Phase male learners experience aggression in a variety of ways and most
of the participants in this study emphasised aggression or aggressive behaviour as a phenomenon linked to the influence of gender and masculinity.

The second phase and aim of the research study encompassed describing guidelines that could assist male learners to cope with and manage aggression constructively in school. The analysis and interpretation of data from the interviews served to inform the drawing up of the guidelines for Phase Two.

The following section will present the discussion on the researchers' field notes, after which guidelines to assist male learners to cope with and manage aggression in school will be provided.

5.3 DISCUSSION OF FIELD NOTES

As part of the data collection process, the researcher's observations pertaining to theoretical and methodological processes including personal reflections were described as part of the field notes. The descriptive notes were formatted in the observation checklist (Table 3.1). Non-verbal aspects of the participants' behaviours were also observed.

5.3.1 Observational Notes

Most participants displayed an enthusiasm for being part of the research process. Most participants engaged in the introductory ice-breaker activity of drawing an experience of aggression that they had at school. Participants worked with ease visualising a significant experience of aggression they had experienced.

My general observation of the culture and ethos of two schools indicated that discipline was maintained by procedural instructions from the principals to the teachers and learners during their assembly times. The one school used the intercom system to remind teachers that they had to accompany learners during the change of periods. This method seemed adequate as the researcher noted there was minimal noise and disturbances. Furthermore the participants who engaged in the interviews were respectful to the researcher.

At one school the principal addressed the assembly with his discussion focussed on unruly discipline. He was conducting an investigation to determine which learner/learners had vandalised a teacher’s car by scratching the paintwork. Furthermore he introduced the method of having all learners place their hands on their heads as they walked from assembly
to their classrooms. Upon enquiry teachers explained that this method was shared by another school and was effective in minimizing disruptive behaviour and noise.

At another school four male learners were eager to participate but their parents did not give consent and thus they were not able to participate in this study. The value of this research study was evident when a parent telephoned the researcher requesting for her child to participate as the consent form was misplaced. The researcher then had to provide another consent form before the learner could participate as the parent needed to give consent.

5.3.2 Theoretical Notes

As the research study focussed on male learners' experience of aggression the researcher had to ensure that the research question of “tell me about an experience of aggression you had at school?” was prioritised. This central question enabled the participants to share concrete examples of their lived experiences of aggression at school.

5.3.3 Methodological Notes

The drawing as an ice-breaker activity afforded some participants the ease with which to transition into the semi-structured one-on-one phenomenological interview. Even though the researcher had explained the purpose of the research, the ethical principles of anonymity, privacy and the right to withdraw, a few of the younger participants (10 year olds) found the start of the semi-structured interview challenging. The onus was on the researcher to rephrase, simplify questions and adapt an invitational role to enable these participants to engage in the semi-structured on-on-one interview. The interviews proceeded as the participants gained confidence in their ability to share their experiences of aggression in school. It is also noted that some of the responses of the participants were close ended and the researcher had to probe to elicit further discussion and in some instances when the researcher noted long silences the researcher proceeded to the next question as indicated in the schedule of interview questions (Appendix F).

5.3.4. Reflective Notes

During the course of the interviews the researcher noted the emotions of anger in two of participant's voices as they shared their experiences of aggression in school. At the conclusion of the interview one learner linked the death of his father to his change in behaviour. The researcher noted that most participants alluded to the fact that they were
victims of aggression rather than the perpetrators themselves. A few participants seemed to be bold to share that they were the cause of provocation in the unfolding of the aggressive event. A pattern that emerged at one primary school was the interactive aggression between the participants themselves. This was noted as they named the targets/victims involved the cycle of aggression.

As part of the schedule of questions (Appendix F) the participants were asked about their participation in the research as “How did you feel about this interview?” Some responses to this question were:

“... very comfortable, very nice. That I got to talk to somebody, and why must I hide from other people.” (P21)

“... nice telling you about how I feel.” (P9)

“Interesting.” (P7)

“I found it interesting ... Happy that someone interviewed me ...” (P20)

These statements indicate the value of the research process to give the learners an opportunity to voice their experiences. Whilst it was a new and challenging experience for some of the participants these responses reveal a definite need for middle-childhood male learners to be given the platform to be listened to and to be heard. The researcher sensed the necessity for counselling and support with regards to helping both the perpetrators and victims of aggression to deal with their social and emotional difficulties and enable them acquire skills to develop effective relationships.

A male learner who had participated in the research project met the researcher a few weeks later and enquired about the “thing” (guidelines) the researcher will provide to the schools so that he could manage his aggressive behaviour. Apparently he had got involved in another aggressive incident and he lost control again.

5.4 GUIDELINES TO ASSIST INTERMEDIATE PHASE MALE LEARNERS TO COPE WITH AND MANAGE AGGRESSION IN SCHOOL

The research question guided the study of male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase was undertaken with threefold aims: First, to explore male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase; secondly to
explore and describe the influence of masculinity on the experiences of male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase; and thirdly to develop and describe guidelines to assist male learners to cope with and manage aggression in school. It is thus the third aim of the study which leads to the focus of this section in providing guidelines which need to be taken cognisance of and implemented in equipping male learners with the skills to cope and manage aggressive behaviour.

5.4.1 Introduction

The manifestation of aggressive behaviours varying from verbal to physical in nature and severity translated as concrete experiences of either hostile or instrumental aggression or a combination of both by male learners appears to be a similar and consistent challenge in the three schools where participants were interviewed on their experiences of aggression. The conceptual and theoretical framework of this study illuminated the nature and causes of aggression with a view of the interrelatedness of predisposition, stages of development, the social milieu and masculinity constructs. The interrelatedness of the above lends itself to idea of a “general systems approach” adapted from Marais and Meier (2010), in which the aggressive behaviour and its consequences extended beyond the perpetrator and victim to that of peers, teachers and parents. As the consequences and effects of this behavioural problem impacted negatively on male learners’ self-concept, self-regulation, peer relationships and the teaching-learning environment, male learners’ experiences of aggression needs to be understood as an ‘integrated whole’ wherein a number of internal issues inherent in the male learner and extraneous to him interact to contribute to the development of aggression. If Marais and Meier (2010:4) contend that “self-maintenance,” “survival” and “stability” are stipulated as a systems goal then aggressive behaviour undoubtedly hampers the learner’s self-maintenance, stability and survival in the system, necessitating the development of guidelines to assist male learners acquire and develop skills to cope and manage aggression. Additionally, as stated in the problem statement, male learners who exhibit aggression are at risk of aggressing in adulthood also may “lead to other behavioural problems such as alcohol and drug abuse, violent crime and continues the cycle of abusive parenting” (Connor, 2007). Middle-childhood can be described as a “window period” in which interventions can lessen the gap of the aforementioned concern and the wellbeing and mental health of the child and specifically the boys can be developed physically and psychologically (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:535).
5.4.2 Guidelines for Implementation in School.

From the identified themes and categories the overarching issues that need attention, and from which the guidelines are formulated for male learners in school during the Intermediate Phase, are as follows:

- development of a self-concept focusing on self-reflection and self-regulation
- developing and maintaining social relationships with peers
- development of perspectives taking, empathy, forgiveness and the development of problem solving skills

According to Rogers (quoted by Grobler and Schenck, 2009:24) “... behaviour is basically the goal-directed attempt of the organism to satisfy its needs as experienced in the field as perceived.” Similarly male learners’ experience of aggression typifies anti-social behaviours that are motivated by some personal need, desire or rationale in relation to his internal characteristics and the situation he finds himself in. Additionally the aggressive behaviour does not define the person, that is, the male learner, but is however the male learners’ perception of himself that connects to his behaviour and his repertoire of experiences (Grobler & Schenck, 2009:14). Following this reasoning, self-knowledge and an understanding of the self determines one’s behaviour, emotional responses and values.

5.4.2.1 The person-oriented approach for the development of the self-concept, self-reflection and self-regulation for coping and managing aggressive behaviours.

“Person-oriented approaches” ((Meyer et al., 2008:363-400) focussing on the image and value one has for ones-self offers relevant insight for application. Self-concept is described as the picture or image one has of oneself describing one’s strengths, weaknesses, qualities and cognitive abilities (Papalia et al., 2010:232). An understanding of oneself encompasses self-perception, self-worth and the formation of an identity. In the context of experiencing aggressive behaviours in school male learners’ self-concepts have been challenged as they experienced a period of inferiority when faced with incidents of hostile and instrumental aggression. The effects of engaging in aggression have placed the male learner at risk in terms of highlighting their weaknesses cognitively, behaviourally and socially during their bouts of aggressive behaviours in the cycle of aggression. Feelings of despair, helplessness and anxiety and low self-esteem related to one’s self-concept have emerged. Thus a focus on the male learner as a person who is “capable of change” is aimed at improving and enhancing the male learners’ self-concept (Meyer et al., 2008:363).
Papalia *et al.* (2010:298) maintain that children only begin to verbalise an idea of their self-worth by the age eight. As a starting point Intermediate Phase male learners who manifest aggressive behaviours need to be presented with exercises as part of an intervention strategy where they are requested to consider the following questions: “How do you feel about yourself?” and “How does the view of what you think others think of you influence your view of yourself?” To incorporate the skill of perspectives taking the question of “What would the people you love say about your love for them?” By attempting to answer these questions male learners would be able to draw attention to the “conditions of worth” they represent in their self-concepts, by describing those qualities they need for developing their strengths (*Meyer et al.*, 2008:363). In addition to this activity middle-childhood learners can write a self-description, create a self-portrait of their ideal self or an autobiographical on themselves.

Middle-childhood male learners appreciate the praise and recognition of their teachers especially when they have achieved competence in tasks. According to the researcher, teachers should take cognisance that their attitudes toward learners greatly impacts on the emotional stability and the development of the learners’ self-concept.

Many participants exhibited proactive and reactive aggression simply because they lacked self-regulation which is defined as “a person’s independent control of behaviour to conform to social expectations” (*Papalia et al.*, 2010:234). To prevent and control aggression it is incumbent for male learners to develop their self-regulation skills, in particular, emotional and attentional regulation which requires effort in managing one’s emotions and behaviour (*Papalia et al.*, 2010:386). Learners can strengthen these skills by being coached and as Mynhardt (2009:109) suggests teaching learners to “recognise when their cognitive resources” are exhausted.

5.4.2.2 Developing and maintaining social relationships with peers

According to Mynhardt (2009:65-70), a basic human need is that of affiliation whereby people seek and maintain relationships and that friendships constitute a relationship and interaction between two people outside of a family. Developing and maintaining friendship is a social skill and forms part of the cognitive and social development of the middle-childhood learner. According to Dicker (2007:128) relationships embody the elements of “having knowledge of appropriate social behaviours, using verbal and non-verbal behaviour skills and pro-social motivation and goal orientation.” Based on this explanation, learners firstly need social-skills training so that they are skilled in the values of generosity, sensitivity,
mutual understanding, co-operation, support and honesty which are paramount to maintaining friendships. Life-skills programmes and counselling sessions need to emphasise and create an awareness of maintaining and sustaining valuable interpersonal relationships.

To achieve the aim of developing skills, insight and understanding that will help learners develop and maintain friendships necessitates alertness to the needs of the learners and that learners themselves apply the strategies of valuing social relationships. School programmes and relevant stakeholders should promote social relationships especially amongst middle-childhood learners by means of:

- discussing problems that learners may have with their peers,
- listening to the learners empathetically,
- helping them find meaningful solutions,
- reiterating concepts of trust, compromise and tolerance,
- developing their communication and listening skills and respect for their peers,
- developing sensitivity to needs and feelings of others.

The quality and intensity of relationships between middle-childhood learners depends on their ability and skill to work on, preserve and honour their interactions whilst maintaining healthy friendships.

Snyman (2006:86), in her study of adolescent girls’ experience of non-clinical depression, espouses that the skill of conflict-resolution is necessary to foster and improve interpersonal relationships. The skill of conflict resolution requires cognitive effort on the part of the learner and is an indispensable strategy for preserving friendships. Having good communication skill characterises conflict resolution, otherwise known as negotiation. Negotiation entails skills which can be developed in middle-childhood male learners through “practice and reflection” (Thompson, 2009:181).

Since Hartup (1992:1) advocates that the children’s friendships are predictive of “adult adaptation” of the risk of learners channelling their aggression to adulthood and should be prevented by encouraging social relationships which are emotional resources for having fun and de-stressing, cognitive resources for developing problem-solving skills and knowledge structures and providing the context for developing social skills.
5.4.2.3 The development of empathy, forgiveness, altruism and perspectives taking

Most of the male learners in schools during the Intermediate Phase who perpetrated aggression were described as functioning at a pre-operational and pre-conventional stage of cognitive and moral development respectively (Donald et al., 2006:55). Their aggressive outbursts were due to egocentric thinking and a lack of empathy (Theme one). The value of empathy, compassion and forgiveness need to be developed in middle-childhood male learners so that it could suppress aggressive tendencies.

Empathy, described as the ability to experience the same feeling of pain or distress as another person, can be used as a discipline strategy similar to induction (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:423). As a starting point teachers and those involved in skilling learners during intervention programmes should make learners aware of the forgotten term ‘sorry’ which should be said to those who have been hurt.

The development of altruism which is a “selfless concern for the welfare other people” incorporates acts of sharing, showing kindness and cooperating (Shaffer, 1996:558). Middle-childhood male learners need to be exposed to vignettes; stories and role play which requires reasoning about pro-social behaviours demonstrating empathy and altruism. Shaffer (1996:566) offers the following ideas on developing altruism: altruism can be reinforced verbally rather than through tangible rewards; co-operative work and games designed for learners promote qualities of sharing, generosity and helping others. In addition advocates of the social-learning theory maintain that an exposure to altruistic models fulfil a dual role in influencing learners to demonstrate kindness, as well as to help them to understand social responsibility which helps develop a lifestyle of an altruistic nature.

Mynhardt (2009:110) advocates that forgiveness, which entails aborting the idea or thought of mediating revenge or punishment on a transgressor and responding to them kindly, is a technique to prevent and control aggression. The trait of forgiveness needs to be inculcated in middle-childhood male learners as forgiveness stems from the value of empathy, it allows for varying attributions on the causes of behaviour and it prevents regressing to past incidents.

5.4.2.4 The development of problem-solving skills

The participants’ aggressive behaviours, whether verbally or physically demonstrated, mainly as hostile or reactive aggression as a result of innate or social and cultural factors,
indicates the participants’ lack of ability to cope with aggressive behaviours (Theme Two, Category one). To counteract this developmental risk, Donald et al. (2006:172) maintain that effective problem-solving skills can contribute to the formation of resilience which could assists the participants managing their and others’ aggression. The cognitive skill of problem solving would enable the learners to have access to various strategies with which to handle and solve their aggressive situations.

According to Smith et al. (2005:231) cognitive-behavioural interventions encompassing “self-instructional training, cognitive restructuring, relaxation training and verbal mediation” are ways to develop problem solving. Problem-solving skills can be taught to learners through role-plays, self-evaluation, modelling, feedback and reinforcement (Smith et al., 2005:231).

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The rationale for the recommendations emanates from the discussion of the data findings of male learner’s experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase. Drawing from the difficulties that participants have experienced in their cognitive and social-emotional domains in handling aggression and anger as well as from the concerns participants have expressed regarding authority intervention, the researcher has firstly suggested a few recommendations for teachers that can be included in programmes for ameliorating aggression in school and secondly, recommendations for future research.

5.5.1 Recommendations for Teachers for Implementation

The suggested guidelines were specifically provided to guide male learners, but the guidelines will also have the potential to contribute to the skills development of all learners including girls. Teachers at school are central figures acting in loco parentis (acting as a parent), obligated to promote the wellbeing of the learners by implementing ‘proactive measures to protect learners from harm” (Prinsloo, 2005:6). It is recommended that the guidelines provided to assist the learners can be implemented by teachers. Teachers implementing aggression management programmes may not be able to successfully manage and alleviate the problem of aggression in school, as there is the possibility of other biological, social and cultural factors that contribute to aggression. Since teachers have the role of developing a child holistically, there must be endeavours to promote learners’ mental
health, enhance moral reasoning and self-regulation and reduce behaviours that are at risk for adult aggression.

So in the consideration of the cognitive and socio-emotional factors which play a central role in the development of aggression tendencies in male learners (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:207-223) and in applying the theoretical underpinnings of Piaget (1953), Vygotsky (1978) and Kohlberg (1976) the following recommendations can be developed into programmes for teachers/school management for the purpose of dealing promptly and adeptly with aggression, promoting pro-social behaviours, increasing moral reasoning and developing conflict-resolution skills.

5.5.1.1 Programme development and policy implementation

The value of teachers demonstrating and skilling learners in identifying conflict and resolving conflict exemplifies a mutual relationship between teachers modelling conflict resolution skills through observational learning or vicarious conditioning “scripts” for the demonstration of appropriate behaviour (Fiske, 2010:407).

Emphasis is placed on the word ‘skilling’ learners as opposed to teaching learners as it entails providing learners with sufficient opportunities for the practical application of values, attitudes and skills which must be acquired through interactive simulation, drama, and through actual everyday experiences which should form part of the schools programme and policy to ameliorate aggression. Epp and Watkinson (1996:91) advocate that prevention and intervention programmes must be incorporated into the curriculum. The motivation for highlighting skilling learners arises from the fact that schools must implement the Life Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for Life Skills (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011:8-10) which provides opportunities to address the personal, social and emotional development of learners’ skills, attitudes and values. Support for the above discussion is evidenced in the statement “implicit modelling and explicit teaching of values” by Lovat, Toomey, Clement, Crotty and Nielsen (2009:3), implying that teachers must intervene actively and intensely by means of programmes and policy documents such as the CAPS 2011 policy document (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

Whilst the above focuses on teachers serving as role models for conduct competencies and character building, the latter half zooms in on conflict identification and resolving conflict to be addressed in the Life Skills subject area. The emphasis here is on identifying conflict indicating that teachers and learners themselves cannot differentiate between serious and trivial reasons for aggression. Arguments turn into physical fights which usually occur as a
result of their inability to recognize triggers that evoke anger and frustration thereby typically fuelling the aggression cycle, resulting in harm and injury.

Teachers do not have ample time to deal with aggressive incidents timeously and effectively; it thus becomes necessary to train teachers and learners with strategies to identify triggers of conflict so that it can be dealt with effectively.

5.5.1.2 Adoption and implementation of a coaching model

As an assumption of this study is that the lack of effective management of aggression and the resolution of conflict by teachers culminates in the participants' dependency on an external locus of control, effective authority intervention will have the prospect of ameliorating aggression to improve their internal locus of control and perspective taking skills of learners. Guetzole (2006:1) adds that teachers and coaches should not ignore verbally or physically aggressive incidents but should react with “immediate non-aggressive consequences.” The researcher suggests that teachers adopt and implement a coaching model appropriate in the context of their school environment.

A coaching model is a “form of inquiry-based learning characterised by collaboration” between a learner(s), teachers and professional developers or coaches (Department of Education, 2007:1). In adapting the idea of instructional coaching, a coaching model therefore offers support, feedback, appropriate interventions and intensive training and skilling relevant to the learners’ need of managing aggression as one way of achieving effective behaviour management. Knight (2006:5-6) advises that the coaching should be implemented “properly” and “meaningfully” for “sustained change” in the learners management of aggressive behaviours.

Modelling, coaching and scaffolding, which are featured principles of Vygotsky’ Enculturation Theory, should be incorporated in the coaching model providing support for the learners. As coaching is highly “interactive and situated,” it is essential that the coach offers “encouragement, assistance, direction and feedback” to the learner timeously (Department of Education, 2007:71).

5.5.1.3 Sensitisation of gender roles: Masculinity

The challenge for educators is to promote gender equity through the use of “non-sexist language”, use of “non-sexist resources” and engage in “non-sexist play” (MacNaughton, 2006:129). As traditional gender roles for boys devalue friendships, it is necessary for
teachers to promote effective relationship-building skills in Intermediate Phase learners in order to understand gender roles in cultural context that do not promote discrimination on the basis of gender.

According to McDevitt and Ormrod (2010: 539), differences in interpersonal behaviours occur as a result of gender, ethnic and cultural factors as well special needs. Moreover boys prioritize action play over forming intimate relationship whereas girls share intimate bonds (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010:540). Nevertheless middle-childhood male learners need to invest in developing and maintaining meaningful interpersonal relationships.

5.5.2 Availability of Counsellors and Qualified Psychologists at Schools

Many public schools, whether adequately resourced or under resourced, do not have access to school counsellors at their schools nor have the finances to acquire the services of a psychologist to effectively address learners’ aggressive tendencies. The absence of counsellors at most schools makes it difficult for teachers to fulfil the role of a counsellor as they lack the necessary expertise. As counsellors and psychologists are not available to work one on one with the victims and the targets of aggression timeously, teachers take on that role and do not always have the knowledge and skills to fulfil the role of counsellors and psychologists in order to assist learners in managing aggression and providing appropriate intervention strategies. The researcher therefore recommends that the Department of Education provide for this specific need at schools.

5.5.3 Recommendations for Further Study

The researcher recommends that further research needs to address:

- Gender roles in cultural contexts.
- Since there is limited number of studies exploring middle-childhood aggression, especially in the context of a masculinity perspective, it is suggested that more detailed studies such as this should be replicated to a larger population. Such studies as male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase will make it possible to illuminate the phenomenon of aggression as experienced in other categorical classifications such as culture and sport, and an exploration of aggression within the context of private schools to determine the universality of aggressive trends in middle childhood. Since educational progress is pivotal to a country’s economic
welfare, the psychological and educational wellbeing and the interests of the nation’s children should be prioritised by engaging in scientific research studies which should accelerate the development of programmes for the personal development of not only male learners but all learners experiencing challenges in the teaching and learning environment.

- Significant and relevant research findings emanating from academic research needs to be made available to all teachers and school management and to school districts as it will broaden their knowledge basis and allow them to keep abreast of latest developments which may impact on the development of learners and teaching and the learning climate.

- The researcher also recommends that a writing frame (narratives) could be implemented as a means to elicit data. The writing frame would consist of sentence starters which learners could complete verbally or in written form. However these sentence starters should be constructed in alignment with the measures of trustworthiness and ethics without imposing the researchers' biases and suppositions within the framework of the sentence starters. Sentence starters would not be as self-imposing as interview questions and would encourage learners to share information. Photo-voice narrative elicitation could also provide a useful and interactive data generation method of allowing participants to present their lived experiences of masculinity.

- If schools find that aggression amongst boys is a recurring and unmanageable pattern at their schools then it is incumbent on them that a holistic investigation is done to assess and address the problematic situation. Relevant stakeholders, including the learners, should articulate their views on the nature and extent of the aggressive behaviour. Since the findings indicate a shift towards traditional masculine ideals of power, dominance and physical use of violence, then schools need to consider whether the school or perhaps the social cultural environment is endorsing a “complicit” form of hegemonic representation (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997: 212).
5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Firstly, the sample size was small (9 male learners from three primary school totalling 27 participants) and hence not a representative sample of all primary schools, therefore the findings cannot be generalised to all Intermediate Phase male learners in South African schools. In spite of the small sample the findings of this research study suggested significant evidence on male learners’ experiences of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase. Secondly, some learners who wanted to take part in the study were not able to do so as their parents did not give their consent. Thirdly, although drawings were used as an icebreaker activity and not for diagnostic purposes, three of the grade 4 participants encountered problems with the term ‘aggression’ due to a language barrier - they could not fully verbalise their experience of aggression.

Finally, the question two of the semi-structured question schedule of: “Could you define a boy or say what a boy is to someone who has never met or known a boy before, say perhaps to an alien?” presented a difficulty or a distraction from the main context of the question to a few grade four learners, who did not know the meaning of an alien. In consideration of ethical responsibility, the researcher then ensured that in the processes of participation the researcher rephrased the question as: “Explain or tell me the meaning of the word boy” in order to ensure the data collected from the four participants were valid within the context of their experience of the phenomenon.

5.7 SUMMARY

This research study explored and described Intermediate Phase male learner’s experience of aggression utilizing a qualitative design and phenomenological inquiry. In exploring the experiences of aggression a significant finding was that aggression was experienced by Intermediate Phase male learners in school in various ways. To sum up the corpus of data, the central themes identified were: Intermediate Phase male learners describe aggression using concrete examples of their lived experience; male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase which forms a cycle of aggression; and Intermediate Phase male learners make suggestions in managing their own and others’ aggression in school.
The influence of masculinity perspectives on the experiences of learners’ experiences of aggression allowed for the analysis of data to inform research on the relevance that gender roles occupy in bullying and gangs and other aggressive incidents.

The differentiation made by the participants between the roles of boys and girls highlights the need for anti-sexist education. In addition to these gender differences, the aggressive experiences of male learners indicate an influence of a dominant and hegemonic masculinity which features sporting prowess, privilege over girls and competitiveness. This form of patriarchal and dominant gender role needs an ideological transition to “utopian change” of new gender roles and relationships as social context for aggression (Richardson & Hammock, 2007; Kimmel, 1996:257). Furthermore, the male learners’ ideas of masculinity illustrates to a certain extent how the principle of power is demonstrated through their practice of aggression, bullying and gang activity as a means to maintain their self-worth whilst complying to a “historically specific, socially constructed and imposed, and personally embodied masculinity” (Frank, 1996:113). The Sex-Role Socialisation Theory has provided evidence on how children acquire traditional gendered identities and stereotyped behaviours which seem to cultivate gender inequities expressed as unfair and unsafe behaviour (MacNaughton, 2006:129,135). Hence intervention guidelines and recommendations as measures to promote the holistic development of the learner should incorporate the sensitisation of gender roles (masculinity) which may assist learners to understand gender so as not to exclude or treat others aggressively as a result of their gender. On the basis that masculinity is not a fixed propensity and that the male learners’ aggressive experiences coalesced with hegemonic ideals, it is hoped that this study will provide the impetus for further research to investigate the status quo of changing masculinities and boys’ traditional gendered experiences.

Unless aggression is addressed and middle-childhood male learners receive guidance and skills to cope with and manage aggression constructively, aggression, which is a learned behaviour, will permeate their repertoire of behaviours and form part of their cognitive knowledge structures, schemas and scripts whereby they may become primed for aggression. The main theories of aggression, namely, the Social Learning Theory, Cognitive Neo-Association Theory, General Aggression Model and the bio-social theories provided explanations on how aggressive behaviours are acquired either by observation or through personal and situational determinants which impact on the cognitive domain. Aggressive scripts are developed, processed and accessed to guide behaviour at an opportune time (Anderson & Bushman, 2002:30-31).
The findings indicate a polarisation of the teachers’ disempowerment and inadequacies in managing aggression and the negative impact of aggression on the participants’ developmental levels. Aggression amongst male learners in schools during the Intermediate Phase needs to be addressed as aggression does not occur in a vacuum but affects the cognitive, social and affective domains of the learners’ development and also their own mental health. From a general systems approach the male learners’ aggressive behaviours extend injury and harm not only to the victim/target but to other individuals internal to the school and external life-lines.

The challenge of male learner aggression needs to be addressed amongst researchers, decision makers in education/government and the health sector and translated into professional and consistent interventions and measures to ameliorate aggressive tendencies that culminate in physical and psychological harm. In retrospect even though the Convention on the Rights of the Child is enshrined and ratified in South Africa’s democratic constitution and educational legislature (Prinsloo, 2005:5-10) to uphold and promote the physical and mental wellbeing of the learner, policy needs to be implemented in practice in terms of teachers and learners receiving adequate skills training, support and assistance in managing aggressive behaviours. Since decision makers are accountable for learner development, all learners should receive equitable measures and services for protecting their right to respect, dignity, care and education.

The findings from this study not only provided a platform for the male learners’ voices to be heard but also project the needs of Intermediate Phase male learners which are relevant in terms of developing effective intervention strategies and measures that will assist learners cope with and manage aggression constructively in school. Moreover since aggression presents a risk to learners’ physical and mental wellbeing, intervention programmes must be designed in the best interests of the learner, considering that each school’s demographics, context and culture differ.

The significance of the similarities in the male learners’ experience of aggression in the three primary schools during the developmental stage of middle childhood, translated into concrete experiences, provides evidence that the occurrence of aggressive behaviours presents a challenge for learners and teachers. Stakeholders with a vested interest in education should thus consider intervention programmes.

In conclusion this research study has illuminated important issues for understanding male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase and how it challenges the facilitation of effective teaching and learning. It includes the possible contributions that this study proffers for promoting the holistic development of learners with
regards to problem solving, conflict resolution and interpersonal relationships, teacher training, the development of intervention programmes to manage aggression as well outlining the opportunities for further research.
REFERENCE LIST


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03 May 2011

The Director
Gauteng Department of Education

Re: Request to conduct research in three primary schools in Lenasia

I hereby request permission to conduct a research study at .................Primary School, ............Primary School and ............Primary School in Lenasia as the school environment fits the profile required by the research project.

I am currently an educator completing part time studies at the North West University. As part of my Masters degree, I plan to conduct a research project titled: Male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase.

This study will require me to interact and interview heterogeneous Intermediate Phase male learners. The duration of the study is approximately a week. My research study will therefore require the voluntary participation of male learners. My role is primarily that of researcher as I acquire an understanding of the lived experiences of aggression by the learners in school. All the information obtained from the school/participants/parents/guardians will be maintained within the ethical boundaries of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality as determined by the North-West University.

Once the study is completed I shall be able to provide the participants with guidelines in the form of a Multi-Media Disc with skills to cope with aggression at school. The participants will not receive any remuneration for their contributions; however, they will have the opportunity to be heard as they share their unique views and opinions on their experiences of aggression.

I sincerely hope you will be able to accommodate me. Thanking you for your assistance in this regards.

Yours sincerely

Thamendhree Naidoo (Miss)  Dr A.J. Botha
MEd Student (0842512671) (Study leader)
APPENDIX B
Letter of approval from Gauteng Department of Education
GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date: 6 May 2011
Name of Researcher: Naidoo T.
Address of Researcher: 63 Camellia Avenue
                          Extension 2
                          Lenasia
Telephone Number: 011 852 3614 / 084 251 2671
Fax Number: 011 854 7027
Email address: thamendhree@gmail.com
Research Topic: Intermediate Phase male learners' experience of aggression: A masculinity perspective
Number and type of schools: THREE Primary Schools
District(s)/HO Johannesburg Central and Johannesburg South

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school(s) and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager(s) concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher(s) has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager(s) must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher(s) have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.

Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research
9th Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506
Email: David.Mukhado@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gov.za

For administrative use:
Reference no. D2012/51
APPENDIX C
Letter to principals

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520
Tel: +27(18) 299-4741

The Principal
.............Primary

Re: Request to conduct research

I am currently an educator completing part time studies at the North West University. As part of my Masters degree, I plan to conduct a research project titled: The Intermediate Phase Male Learners' Experiences of Aggression in School: A Masculinity Perspective.

This study will require me to interact and interview heterogeneous Intermediate Phase male learners. Drawings by the participants will be used to elicit communication on the experiences of aggression. The duration of the study is approximately a week. My role is primarily that of researcher as I acquire an understanding of the lived experiences of aggression by the learners in school. The learner's participation is completely voluntary. The school/learners/parents names will remain anonymous and confidential.

Once the study is completed I shall be able to provide the participants with guidelines in the form of a Multi-Media Disc with skills to cope with aggression at school. The participants will not receive any remuneration for their contributions; however, they will have the opportunity to be heard as they share their unique views and opinions on their experiences of aggression. I hereby request permission to conduct research at your school.

Thanking you for your attention

Yours sincerely

Thamendhree Naidoo (Miss)
MEd Student
0842512671
Dr A.J. Botha
(Study leader)
Dear Parent/Guardian

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

My name is Thamendhree Naidoo (Denese) and I am currently completing my Master's degree in teaching and learning at the North-West University. My studies incorporate a research project titled: The Intermediate Phase Male Learners Experiences of Aggression in School: A Masculinity perspective. The aim of this research project is to gain an understanding of the learner’s experiences of aggression and to draw up guidelines that will provide the learners with skills to cope with aggression.

I hereby request permission for your child to participate in this research project that will be conducted at ........................................... school. Your child’s participation will include creating a drawing on his experience of aggression at school followed by a one-on-one interview which will be audio taped for record purposes. Your child’s participation will be voluntary and will remain anonymous and confidential. The above mentioned activities will not infringe on teaching and learning time and should last for an hour over two days and will be done in consultation with the principal and relevant educators.

I would greatly value and appreciate your permission and your child’s willingness to participate in this study. Participants’ will receive a Multi-Media Disc with skills to cope with aggression once the study has been completed. Please complete the section below if you are willing to grant your child permission to participate.

Kind regards

T.Naidoo
0842512671
MEd Student

Dr A.J. Botha
(Study leader)

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

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

Parent Signature............................................................      Date ...........................................................

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Dear participant

I hereby request permission from you to take part in my research project: “The Intermediate Phase male learners’ experiences of aggression in school: A masculinity perspective”. You as an individual will have the opportunity to share YOUR experiences with me. Your participation in the drawings and the interviews is voluntary and will remain confidential and anonymous. You may withdraw from the study at any stage.

Thanking you

Thamendhree Naidoo (Miss)
MEd Student

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.
### Semi – Structured One-on-One Phenomenological Interview

Questions to be presented as part of the data collection phase once learners have completed their drawings on their experiences of aggression at school. NB The drawings form part of the ice breaker activity and will not be subject to diagnostic and statistical analyses. The questions focus on the lived experiences of aggression. There is the possibility that the sequence and the form of the question may change in order to follow up on the answers given by the learners as suggested by (Kvale2007:65).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Can you tell me about an experience of aggression you have had at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Could you define a boy or say what a boy is to someone who has never met or known a boy before, say perhaps to an alien?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How did you find the interview?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G
Interview transcript

Transcript    Participant 25    P: Participant    I: Interviewer
I: How old are you?
P: Eleven.
I: What grade are you in?
P: Six.
I: How long had you been at the school?
P: Seven years.
I: I have a few questions to ask you? Are you okay with that?
P: Yes.
I: Can you tell me about a time when you were aggressive at school?
P: When I was fighting with............... (Name of a boy).
I: What happened?
P: We will got hurt and we felt like fighting more.
I: So you and (name of a boy) were fighting you wanted to fight more. Why were you (name of a boy) fighting?
P: Cos I was teasing him.
I: You want to tell me more about that?
P: (Silence)
I: What were you teasing him?
P: Because his ears are different.
I: His ears as are different. How different is his ears from yours?
P: Uh?
I: How different is his ears from yours?
P: His ears are big.
I: What words did you use when you were teasing him?
P: “Big ears”
I: How do you think he felt when you called him “Big ears?”
P: Unhappy.
I: So you and............... were fighting because you teased him.
P: Yes.
I: Can you tell me more about that fight?
P: We started punching each other.
I: Yes?
P: And then my friends tried to stop us but they couldn’t.
## Observation checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym Person</th>
<th>Date/ Time</th>
<th>Setting/ Context</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Verbal/non verbal Expression of behaviour</th>
<th>Actions/ Engagement</th>
<th>Interruption</th>
<th>Clarification</th>
<th>Personal Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
APPENDIX I
Certificate for language editing
BRENT'S ART AND LANGUAGE SERVICE CC

8 Rembrandt Street, Vanderbijlpark 1911 * Telephone/Fax: 016 – 9325528
e–fax: 086 675 4144 * e-mail: brentboy@lantic.net

CERTIFIED STATEMENT OF EDITING AND TRANSLATION

It is hereby certified that the Master’s dissertation:

“Male learners’ experience of aggression in school during the Intermediate Phase”

by Thamendhree Naidoo

has been edited by me.

Date: 3rd September 2012

B.Record  BA (HONS), UED, NH Dip, M.Tech.
Member of the South African Translators’ Institute  Member No. 1002094

BRENT’S ART & LANGUAGE SERVICE CC Registration No. 2000/005438/23