LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COPORATE BULLYING

By

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DECLARATION

I declare that **Lived experiences of corporate bullying** is my original work.
The thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other
university, and all the sources I have used, or quoted, have been indicated
and acknowledged by complete references in the text.

Signed: Date: 14 December 2021

ABSTRACT

Corporate bullying is a social phenomenon that impacts negatively on employee wellness, relationships in the workplace, and on family well-being. The aim of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of the employees regarding corporate bullying and the influence it has on them. The objectives were: (a) to explore and describe the understanding and experience of the employees who were victims/survivors of bullying in the workplace; (b) to construct meaning by interpreting perceptions about the phenomenon through conversations about bullying in the workplace and illustrate the perceived gaps in implementation of policies by organisations.Women in the Cape Peninsula in the Western Cape, who experienced corporate bullying, were recruited using non-probability snowball sampling. In-depth interviews with seven females were conducted and Relational-Cultural Theory, which is a strand of feminist theory, was adopted as a lens to contextualize and synthesize the findings. Interpretative Phenomenological Approach was utilized to better understand this phenomenon and data was thematically analyzed. Four main themes with several subthemes emerged which included participants' diverse perceptions of their experiences and how they interpret or define corporate bullying. The findings also show that perceived bullying had adverse effects on participants' relationships with colleagues in the workplace and on their intimate partner relationships. The study also found that employee assistance programmes are not always accessible and when employees are able to access such services, they do not have confidence in the Human Resources personnel to address corporate bullying. Most concerning is the impact of perceived corporate bullying on the mental health of the participants which included depression and anxiety. Recommendations are made for improving Human Resource policies, ensuring staff wellness and for more research to be conducted on corporate bullying from an occupational social work perspective.

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To God be the glory, great things He has done! Thank you, Father, for your strength that has sustained me.

This thesis is dedicated to every individual who has suffered or been exposed to or influenced by bullying in the workplace. For every effort made to resolve, to stay, to keep your dignity and remain professional, I salute you. I trust that the journey has made you stronger and bolder. Mine defiantly has.

To my husband, Adrian, thank you for your love, patience and support, and for always pushing me . I appreciate you!

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- The brave women who shared their experiences for the purpose of this research. I value the trust you had in me to openly share your life experience.
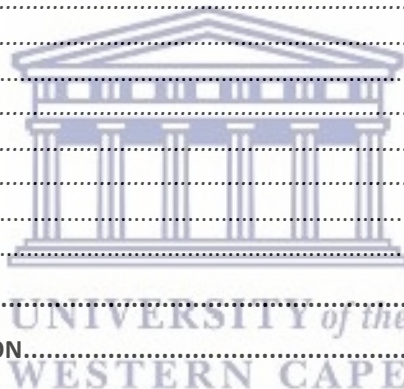
LIST OF ACRONYMS

Continuous Professional Development	CPD
Corporate bullying	CB
Employee Assistance Programme	EAP
Employment Equity Act of 1998	EEA
Employment Equity	EE
Feminist Phenomenology	FP
Feminist Relational Cultural Theory	FRCT
First Person Approach	FPA
Human Resource Professionals	HR
International Federation of Social Workers	IFSW
International Labour Organization	ILO
Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis	IPA
Labor and Management Administrators and Consultants on Alcoholism	LMACA
Life World Approach	LWA
Occupational Social Work	OSW
Positive Organizational Behavior	POB
Positive Organizational Scholarship	POS
Positive psychology	PP
Reflective-relational Approach	R-RA
Relational-Cultural Theory	RCT
South African Council for Social Service Professions	SACSSP
Workplace bullying	WPB
World Health Organization	WHO

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CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will be using the term 'workplace bullying' and 'corporate bullying' interchangeably. Most of the literature uses 'workplace bullying' to refer to bullying committed by individuals in the workplace. However, I use both terms to refer to this phenomenon.

The workplace is where employees spend most of their time. For this reason, psycho-social services play a vital role in the workplace. Where workplaces have them, these services are generally provided through Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP). EAP is based on the recognition that work plays a fundamental role in people's lives, providing for basic needs such as food and shelter, but also affecting social, family, workplace and community relationships (Joseph, Walker & Fuller-Tyszkiewics, 2018). Most often the service is offered to employees and delivered by professionals such as registered occupational therapists, social workers, and trained counsellors. In some companies, services are extended to the families of employees too. The aim of such services is to ensure that employees are productive and functional in the workplace and to help them overcome challenges that may negatively affect their work performance (Sparks, Faragher & Cooper, 2001).

Having an occupational social work background and having studied the literature produced on the topic over the past two decades, I realised that there are still many unanswered questions regarding employee wellbeing in the workplace. This is despite considerable advances in knowledge in this field. My experience as a social worker helped me to reflect critically on the theoretical framework and explanations used in the literature to define and understand the phenomenon of corporate bullying. I found that the bulk of academic studies on the phenomenon emanate from disciplines such as psychology and education, but that there are gaps in knowledge and a paucity of published studies in the field of social work, and specifically, occupational social work (OSW). The issue of bullying is described as complex, yet oversimplified, misunderstood and under-researched.

From a South African perspective, both OSW and EAP are concerned with delivering services to employees and employers. However, they are regulated by different professional bodies, and

the nature of the social services they provide appear to be different from the generalist developmental services rendered by social workers employed by the State, i.e., the National Department of Social Development or other departments (Health, Education, Justice, Correctional Services, etc.) and private, non-profit organisations (NPOs).

The Employee Assistance Professionals' Association (EAPA–SA) was established in 1997 for EAP practitioners. Its membership consists of 3500 individuals and organisations with an interest in EAP, including but not limited to EAP practitioners, professional designations accredited by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and social workers (EAPA-SA, 2016). It is concerned with professional standards and ethics and the continued professional development of its members (EAPA-SA, 2016). Historically, the Association was known as the Association of Labour and Management Administrators and Consultants on Alcoholism (ALMACA), which had its first organising meeting in April 1971. The name was officially changed to Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) in 1989 (RSA, 1989).

The South African Occupational Social Workers' Association (SAOSWA) was founded in 2003, with the aim of upholding and safeguarding the interests of OSWs and their clients (SAOSWA, 2018). Although EAP and OSW share similar visions, clarity still needs to be obtained regarding their respective boundaries and differences when it comes to the role(s) played and services rendered by both disciplines in the workplace and to families. As an occupational social worker conducting EAP, my previous portfolio consisted of a wide range of social work tasks that overlapped with direct developmental OSW services to clients/employees, supervision and management of social workers, and attending to employer-related matters.

1.2 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

Lutgen-Sandvik, Namie and Namie (2010) defined workplace bullying as an insistent, non-physical and inappropriate treatment expressed in words towards one or more people and occurring over an extended period of time. It involves recurring verbal abuse and health-harming behaviour, which threatens, humiliates, intimidates, or interferes with work (Fapohunda, 2013). Workplace bullying is "a display of hostile messages and abusive

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behaviours constantly directed at the same individual/s, with repetition, duration, escalation and power further adding to the abuse of the victim" (Fapohunda, 2013:39).

In using gender as a specific category to filter my search for relevant studies, I encountered several recent studies that made reference to the issue of gender and bullying. Yet social work perspectives were scant.

A study conducted in 2007 by the Corporate Bullying Institute located in the United States found that 62% of males were bullies and 58% of incidents targeted females. Another study conducted by Fapohunda (2013) indicated that 71% of females and 29% of males reported being targets of corporate bullying, where males dominated as the bully. Women tend to be targets for corporate bullying by males because they are perceived as caregivers and the more passive sex (Fapohunda, 2013; Landman & Ndou, 2013). However not many studies – certainly none that I found – reported on women as bullies.

Men do not often report being bullied, especially by females, as men are perceived and described as problem solvers and the more dominant sex. Females are often described with words such as sensitive, passive, emotional and nurturing, while males are described as masculine, tough, aggressive, non-emotional and competitive (Fapohunda, 2013; Landman & Ndou, 2013). These perceptions feed into the ease with which men adopt the role of bullies and women, the role of victims of bullying.

General and sexual harassment are identified and discussed as more specialised forms of bullying (Bacchi, 1999; 2009). With reference to sexual harassment and bullying, Smith (2014), citing Salin (2003:1219), suggests that the two forms are often similar "due to the organisational power differences that are rooted in societal power differences".

1.2.1 Occupational social work as part of employee assistance programmes

Occupational social workers, like all practising social workers in South Africa, must register with the South African Council of Social Service Professions (SACSSP) in terms of the Social Service Professions Act No. 110 of 1978. While the generalist approach to social work predominates in South Africa (Patel, 2013), the SACSSP currently endorses a rights-based developmentalist social work perspective. This perspective applies to undergraduate curricula

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for professional education and training, including the continuous professional education (CPD) of social workers (SACSSP, 2021). South African social developmental policies and developmental social work is thus particularly concerned with promoting the South African Bill of Human Rights that seeks to address the human and social needs of all individuals, families and communities in the country. Given the wide spectrum of social development policy services across all sectors of society, the specialised nature and field of OSW remains largely inaccessible, if not unknown, to most working citizens and their families. The structural and chronic nature of unemployment in democratic South Africa has meant that few corporate employers or small or medium firms employ OSW or have specialised EAP.

The OSW field seeks to address the human and social developmental needs of the work community within a developmental approach using a variety of interventions which aim to foster optimal adaptation between individuals and their environment. However, this specialised service appears to be fragmented and not well integrated and implemented in workplaces, remaining largely under reported and under researched in terms of social work perspectives. Previously corporate organisations would employ occupational social workers to deliver social services to employees as part of EAP. This trend however changed over time, as EAPs became more needed in the working world. This led to a perceived split between the more conventional OSW and the EAP, with the two areas of practice becoming increasingly separated and now practised more independently (Mor-Barak & Bargal, 2000:3). Having the services of both or either of these fields of specialisation in the workplace could help prevent workplace bullying and assist those already exposed to it. This will enable victims to deal with it proactively and positively and could help perpetrators to understand and change their own behaviour.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As an OSW practitioner working with clients, and as a female employee in various workplaces, I developed a keen interest in the lived experiences of other women in the workplace. The ways in which women make meaning of their experiences, especially of corporate bullying pointed me in the direction of the scholarly contributions of feminist researchers and their scientific studies in related topics.

Feminist theory therefore became a key entry point in my selection of relevant critical theories. My choice of feminist theory as a framework for this social work research project was apt, in view of the perceived invisibility of the issue of corporate bullying. Various practice-based

dilemmas at organisational level and the emerging role that gender plays in scholarly studies validated my choice and narrowed my focus to the lived experiences of individual females who, like myself, have survived corporate bullying.

Through extensive reading and research, I came to regard a feminist interpretation of Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) as an important lens through which to view the phenomenon and adapt it for a social work supervision and management point of view. This particular appeal when one is seeking to deeply understand human development. In this regard, Jordan (2008) makes the assumption that individuals' happiness and well-being are products of the degree to which they participate in growth-fostering relationships. Jordan (2008) argues that participation in meaningful relationships is dictated by universal socio-political factors such as social norms within peer groups and larger institutions, and public policies.

RCT from a feminist perspective concerns itself with all women, examining the role of language and power in relationships, and the imperative of feminist practice in addressing social change (West, 2005). What makes feminist theory and RCT compatible with one another is that they both consider the experiences of individuals as valuable.

RCT holds that human beings move toward independence and autonomy through the development of meaningful relationships with others. We develop what Jordan (2008), drawing on Frey (2013), calls a 'felt sense of self'. This allows for our psychological health to mature throughout our lifespan. Frey (2013) further suggests that RCT emphasises social justice and the importance of relationships to human development.

Contrary to RCT, the traditional perspectives of human development argue that separation-individuation of the self is essential in order to achieve relationship intimacy. Whether viewed in the light of traditional human development theories or RCT, bullying in any form hinders the principles of a growth-fostering relationship. It causes a breakdown in relationships and the victim is normally the one who loses the ability to live authentically.

Jordan and Romney (2005:203) argued that RCT emphasises the value of mutual empowerment, authenticity, and mutual empathy, and that experiencing these qualities allow mutual influence, openness and the ability and willingness to enter fully into relationship while being aware of one's potential effect on others.

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The primary principle of RCT is thus that humans grow through and toward relationships throughout the lifespan (Jordan, 2017). The model further shows that interdependence and mutuality are vital to healthy emotional development (Jordan, 2008). Interpersonal connections are based on mutual empathy, clarity, sense of worth, creativity and the desire for more connection (Jordan, 2017). RCT is also not value neutral. Placing culture in the center of the model, RCT strives to make visible the multi-layered connections that belie the myth of separation (Jordan, 2010).

RCT is about our basic interconnectedness as humans and the certainty of needing one another throughout our lives, which is not seen as a sign of weakness but an integral part of human nature. The need for fellow humans is mutual as we work toward growth-fostering relationships, where both people engaged in any sort of relationship are open to being touched, moved and changed by one another.

1.3.1 Feminist social constructionism

Social constructionism is a theoretical perspective that is influential in sociology, social psychology (Galbin, 2014) and in social policy analysis of social problems (Bacchi, 1999, 2009). Social construction implies an active process of definition and redefinition in which some issues are widely understood to be social problems. Lister (2010:145) distinguishes between top-down and bottom-up approaches in claim-making, where individuals or groups assert grievances or claims with respect to putative conditions, which is relevant in social constructionist accounts of 'social problems. Factors that determine which issues do and do not become widely understood as social problems are important. I believe social constructivist theory, as understood by feminists, is of particular use in this study as the theory asks why some 'private' issues, identified by feminists as problematic in many societies, are ignored; issues such as sexual harassment, corporate bullying or domestic violence. For this reason, social problems need to be well defined, as the material effects of social constructionism may be reflecting wider power relations (Lister, 2010; Bacchi, 1999; 2009).

According to Butler (2020), phenomenology is feminist when it includes gender-related questions about the experiences of different sexes in a specific field of study. Feminism and phenomenology thus mutually inform and enrich each other. Feminism encourages the phenomenological analysis of women's lived experiences within the social milieu in a society built upon inequalities. Phenomenology cautions against merely imposing feminist

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interpretations on women's lived experiences. Generally, phenomenologists are sensitive to a specific context and never generalise beyond the context in which a study is conducted. They do not believe in an objective, external reality that is experienced in the same way by everyone; instead, they assume that reality is a social construction dependent on the meanings people give to their own subjective experiences and interactions with others (Du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014).

In this sense Dukas (2014) drew attention to why feminism and phenomenology were necessary to draw on in her study on depression and working-class women in South Africa. She cited Fisher (2010), who said that feminism and phenomenology both contribute something vital to our understanding of social phenomena, each enriching the possibilities of the other. Phenomenology offers a style for analysis which retrieves and preserves the immediate, vibrant, tangible and compelling lived experiences of the subject, enabling our understanding of these lived experiences and situations, while feminist thought and analysis expands and deepens phenomenological investigation by recalling and insisting on the importance of the lived context, the multiple aspects, particularities, and the dynamics of the social and cultural world. In this way, "the enhanced presence and timbre of the feminist voice in phenomenology, and the phenomenological voice in feminism, can bring forth the clear and distinctive tones of the feminist phenomenological voice" (Dukas, 2014:25).

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The phenomenon of corporate bullying, also referred to as workplace bullying (WPB) is on the rise in many companies in the world, in Africa, and in South Africa. With the growth in certain economies, the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2003) suggests that WPB is not allied to a specific profession or occupation but is represented in various forms. South Africa is a democratic country with a progressive Constitution, a Bill of Human Rights and several pieces of labour and other legislation that support these rights (e.g., The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 and Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000), all of which enshrine the value of diversity in the workplace. Individuals from different age groups, genders, ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic status are required to work together, which can affect the organisation in a good or bad way, depending on how the diversity is handled. Outcomes will be dependent on group

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dynamics, relations of power, the personalities of individuals, and the role of management, all of which may enable or disable bullying in the workplace.

Minority groups (whether by gender, age, race, ethnicity or disability, etc.) may be more susceptible to corporate bullying (Statistics South Africa, 2010). Section 6 of the Employment Equity Act of South Africa highlights the protection of employees from a specific kind of bullying (sexual harassment). However, lack of knowledge or understanding of existing laws and rights means that some people will not be able to identify bullying when it happens, and it may remain 'invisible'. It is therefore the responsibility of organisations to educate and create awareness or empower employees with information and knowledge about the phenomenon of bullying and their rights.

With global policy trends over time, more leadership positions are being held by females (Thornton, 2021), thus changing the gender ratio, with more women becoming the perpetrators of bullying toward male and female victims. It would appear that the playing field for power is shifting, affecting gender relations. Many women are determined to get ahead in male-dominated spheres, and some have adopted working styles and methods once associated with males. Therefore, it is unsurprising that bullying is now initiated by both genders, although the preponderance of cases is still male to female.

WPB is very often misinterpreted or confused with other negative acts at work, such as harassment, victimisation or discrimination. Research on WPB over the last 20 to 30 years has aimed at defining these other negative behaviours (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hoel, Glaso, Hetland, Cooper & Einarsen, 2010), but has not defined what WPB is and is not. WPB is a thus a fairly recent concept. Research shows that in the past, workers experienced workplace violence in more than one form of intimidation related to gender, or sexual and racial harassment (Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994; Hoel, Rayner & Cooper, 1999). It has recently become clear that WPB is a sensitive and gendered topic.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Globally, there is a need for a more interdisciplinary approach to health and wellbeing and a more multi-dimensional view of corporate bullying. WPB is not addressed by existing legal avenues, thus presenting a legal gap, especially in South Africa, where current laws to do with

unfair discrimination do not adequately deal with WPB. Not many social scientific studies on the African continent and/or on the social work perspective report on corporate bullying in the South African organisational context. Thus, this study seeks to fill in the important gaps in the literature from an OSW perspective.

During the four years of my career as an occupational social worker, I encountered an array of psycho-social challenges in the workplace, ranging from personal and family issues to socio-economic and work-related issues that affected the work performance and absenteeism of clients. During this time, over a period of 12-18 months, I observed an unusual increase in matters relating to victimisation, including workplace discrimination and perceived bullying. Employees would, for example, report an increase in stress and anxiety levels owing to perceived unfair treatment at work. Those who reported victimisation incidents usually referred to themselves as being bullied. Some identified subtle cases of sexual harassment, or perceived limitations in terms of access to opportunities for personal or professional development and training. Others reported being physically assaulted or verbally abused.

Apart from these encounters in my work as a professional social worker, I have also experienced and was affected by what I believe was bullying. These occurrences resulted in my interest and desire to develop a deeper professional understanding of the phenomenon. I was able to identify some of the symptoms of bullying in my own work environment and realised that it is a topic not often spoken about in organisations, nor always visible to insiders or outsiders. This study made use of interviews with women only, in various fields, including social workers. The decision to focus on the experiences of women was based on the fact that it was mostly women who reported incidents of bullying during my role as an occupational social worker. My personal experience as a woman furthered my interest in the experiences of women.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION, AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the research and the objectives thereof are the following:

1.6.1 Research question

The main question investigated in this study was explorative and descriptive:

What are the lived experiences of women with regard to workplace or corporate bullying as perceived by female employees in the South African employment context?

1.6.2 Research aim

The aim of this study was to understand the lived experiences of female employees with regard to corporate bullying.

1.6.3 Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- to explore and describe the understanding and experience of female employees who have been victims or survivors of bullying in the workplace,
- to construct meaning by considering the phenomenon in light of conversations and policies that are used to manage bullying in the workplace, and
- to make suggestions for preventing and managing workplace bullying by organisations.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section explains the research design, population and setting, sampling, data collection, data analysis, data verification, and method used for reflexivity.

1.7.1 Research design

Because of the explorative nature of the main research question, the study was conducted using the qualitative interpretivist research paradigm. Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, (2014), regard paradigms as 'clusters of beliefs' that state what should be studied, how research should be conducted, and how results should be understood. Paradigms vary across disciplines. Quantitative research is concerned with numbers, volumes or the size of relations between entities, while qualitative research is interested in meaning making and the quality of the experience. It therefore focuses on detailed descriptions of a phenomenon (Pietkiewiez & Smith, 2012) using participants' own words.

As a researcher drawing on feminist methodology, I was interested in understanding the phenomenon of corporate bullying of women, and for this reason the interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) seemed appropriate, as it focuses on the sharing of information and how people make sense their worlds and/or experiences in their own words. Another reason for using a phenomenological qualitative research approach was for the development and construction of in-depth understanding, in which I as researcher would place myself in the shoes of the subject. The interpretivist tradition, as represented by the phenomenological research approach, aims to understand the social interactions of human

beings. Pietkiewiez and Smith (2012) further explain that interpretative phenomenological analysis is a dual interpretation process in that the participants first make meaning of their worlds, and then the researcher translates their descriptions to make meaning of their meaning(s) (Smith & Osborne, 2008). Participants share their lived experiences in the form of stories or narratives and in this way the researcher is enabled to understand their experiences (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

1.7.2 Population and setting

The population group comprised women employed in various sectors in the Cape Peninsula of the Western Cape Province in South Africa. These sectors included health, social work/social services and education. The characteristics of the target population were deduced from their personal experiences narrated during the interviews. Analysis of data enables me to identify similarities within the group and to define the population parameters. The target population was homogenous in one way, in that all were victims or survivors of corporate bullying. The study considered only women as participants.

1.7.3 Sampling

A sample is a group or part of a population that is considered to be representative of the population (Creswell, 2007). Non-probability snowball sampling was used in my attempt to gain an in-depth understanding of individual experiences of the phenomenon. This sampling technique is used in hidden populations which are difficult for researchers to access, or in cases where a sampling frame is hard to establish. In snowball sampling, it is assumed that individuals are affiliated through links that may be exploited to locate other respondents. Because sample members are not selected from a sampling frame, snowball sampling is subject to numerous biases, unlike probability sampling, where all members of a population have an equal probability of being included in the sample. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001) the snowball sampling method uses referrals by participants who are already involved in the study and who can refer the researcher to individuals who have the same population parameters as themselves (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. 2014). In this study, the selection of participants continued until the data reached saturation, as there is no fixed rule on how large the sample should be. My final sample comprised seven (7) women.

1.7.4 Data collection

Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) explain the qualitative data collection method as an approach in which the researcher attempts to capture all the details of the social setting to provide a detailed description and to convey an intimate feeling of the setting and the inner lives of the people in it. Participants' or subjects' own words are carefully used to construct and describe their experiences and the meanings they assign to them. In conducting interpretative phenomenological research, I made use of an interview schedule as the data collection instrument, conducting one-on-one, open-ended, in-depth interviews. I described the individual accounts of participants' experiences to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexible, flowing conversations to take place and for unexpected issues to be addressed through probing (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

The planned duration of the interviews was 60-90 minutes, depending on the information shared. The interviews were to take place after working hours, in a conducive and private space convenient for the participant and away from the employer. The space needed to be conducive to confidentiality and anonymity, in order to avoid any further victimisation of participants. Furthermore, I needed to apply the listening and interviewing skills that I am familiar with and use on a daily basis in my practice as a professionally trained social worker. In preparation, an interview plan was set up. An in-depth interview schedule was formulated to prompt the participants' sensory and mental perceptions and interpretations. Interviews were recorded and transcribed in line with suggestions by Pietiewicz and Smith (2012).

1.7.5 Interpretive phenomenological analysis and data analysis

According to Creswell (2003), coding is an intense process in data analysis in which the transcripts are carefully read and ideas are jotted down as they come to mind. It involves thinking carefully about the meaning of what has been said, then arranging the data into broad topics. After further reading and reflection, these topics are later formed into categories by grouping related topics together. The detailed information is then coded to generate clear themes.

To ensure than my themes were correctly formulated, I listened to the audio recordings, read transcripts and made notes about the interviews. Notes included general observations and insights that arose while reading and listening. Focus was directed at the content, language and context, as well as the emotional responses of the participants.

Once the themes had been identified, I looked for similarities and differences in the units of data and created sub-themes in order to flesh out each theme. Written narratives were re-examined in light of the themes and in light of the literature and theory, to identify limitations, implications and ideas for future development.

1.7.6 Data verification

Data verification is a process of checking, confirming, making sure and being certain. In qualitative research, verification refers to the mechanisms used during research to incrementally contribute reliability and validity, thus adding to the rigour of a study (Creswell, 2007).

Trustworthiness is obtained through verification of the data. Shenton (2004) identifies the criteria used ensure quality of data: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Researchers ensure credibility by demonstrating that a true picture of the phenomenon under examination is being presented. To ensure transferability, researchers need to give sufficient detail about the context of the fieldwork so that a reader will be able to decide whether the context is sufficiently similar to another situation for the findings to be applicable in that situation. Meeting the dependability criterion is difficult in qualitative work, although researchers should at least strive to enable a future investigator to repeat the study. Finally, to achieve conformability, researchers must take reasonable steps to demonstrate that findings emerge from the data and not from their own predispositions (Shenton, 2004).

1.8 REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity is the ability to examine oneself as the researcher in relation to an individual's interaction with research subjects and the research process (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). As a practitioner who had experienced bullying first-hand, I needed to reflect on any preconceived assumptions, ideas or experiences that could influence my collection and analysis of data. The phenomenon under investigation is a sensitive matter and I, as the researcher, needed to be aware of this, and avoid becoming overly emotional, especially since I have dealt with employees who perceived themselves to have been bullied and have myself been exposed to the phenomenon. In the past, I have had to conduct interventions with employees suffering from stress, depression and anxiety owing to what they described as corporate bullying, while being aware of how it might trigger my own feelings. I was thus used to some degree of

bracketing when it comes to keeping my own thoughts and feelings out of the picture. Most victims of corporate bullying resign; very few remain in the same workplace, even where management takes responsibility to resolve the matter.

As practitioner-researcher I had to maintain a non-judgmental attitude and respect the participants' views. However, it has been of concern to me that so many victims or survivors walk away from their jobs, as I did, because of unaddressed and unresolved issues related to corporate bullying. Organisations and employers have a responsibility to develop policies, educate their staff, and play a proactive role in the resolution process where it occurs. Thus, I felt a high need to gain a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and remain as objective as I could while doing so in order to uncover meaningful data.

Thus, I was aware of the potential influence of my own experiences on the research and took the provision of having regular debriefing sessions with a supervisor, and writing memos, to ensure that the data was not influenced by my own experiences.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted with women working in corporate organisations in the Cape Peninsula, Western Cape, with participants who were employed and had previously been exposed to corporate bullying in the sectors of health, social work/social services and education. The findings, experiences and outcomes of their stories were thus not a reflection of the views of other employees in other sectors of the formal labour market and cannot be generalised to all situations. While the original concept was to follow up the interviews with conversations with family members or significant others, this did not take place because of time constraints.

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical clearance was obtained from the UWC Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Committee before the study was conducted. Consent letters and participant information sheets were disseminated to all participants, explaining the ethical considerations and guidelines for participation in the study. Signed consent was requested and received from selected employers and employees and their families. Participation was voluntary and participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity with regard to private and personal information. They were

informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the process without consequence to themselves. It was not necessary to obtain permission from the companies owing to the fact that participants were no longer employed where the perceived bullying had occurred. We also refrained from involving the companies to protect the identity of the participants.

I arranged for counselling should therapeutic counselling be required by participants as a result of sharing experiences of perceived bullying; participants would have been referred to the relevant counselling centres that specialise in this area (Pietkiewiez & Smith, 2012). In addition, I, as the researcher, am a practising social worker registered with the South African Council of Social Service Professions and bound by its code of ethics.

1.11 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1: Research overview

This chapter has briefly introduced the topic and provided a general overview of the study. A brief review of the literature was provided, along with an outline of the main theories used to understand the data. The chapter also stated the problem statement, the research questions and objectives, the research approach and methodology, the limitations of the study and the ethical considerations observed in the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 2 provides a conceptual framework for corporate bullying and employee assistance programmes (EAPs). It reviews the literature in fields related to corporate bullying. Further, it conceptualises the theoretical perspectives of Feminist Relational Cultural Theory (FRCT) and reviews the importance of social work and supervision. This chapter forms part of the theoretical foundation of the study.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter presents phenomenology as the theoretical framework and discusses Relational Cultural Theory (RCT). The chapter also discusses the interpretive phenomenology approach (IPA) which was selected for data analysis and is further elaborated on in Chapter Four.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology used in the study. The following is discussed: the research design using IPA, the research population and sampling method, the research instrument, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and issues to do with comprehensive reflexivity, which was an important aspect of the study in view of the fact that the topic was personal for me, and I needed to distance myself and control my level of emotional involvement in order to ensure objectivity.

Chapter 5: Research findings and discussion

This chapter presents the findings and an analysis thereof. Key concepts are identified, and the findings are linked to the literature review.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter concludes the research and provides a summary of the objectives, methodology and major findings. I also make suggestions for future research and end this chapter with a chapter summary and a final conclusion of the research study.

1.12 DEFINITIONS OF KEYWORDS

Corporate or workplace bullying: According to Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007) and Yamda, Duffy and Berry (2018), corporate bullying occurs when one or more individuals experience two or more negative acts over a period of time in the workplace, where the targets find it difficult to defend themselves and stop the harmful behaviour. Vickers (2014) argues that corporate bullying happens when one employee creates an intimidating and uncomfortable work environment for one or more employees, usually through both verbal and nonverbal behaviours (Rhodes, Pullen, Vickers, Clegg & Pitsis, 2010). This study examined the lived experiences of women who had been subject to corporate bullying and the effects of such bullying.

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP): The EAP is a programme offered by employers where employees are screened for psychological conditions, provided with counselling, or assisted with referrals for long-term psychological treatment (Weis, 2018). EAPs are there to offer support to employees and to assist them to cope with stressors which may influence their productivity. EAP is important in this study as the study examines bullying in the workplace

and the impact it has on employees. EAP can be used as one way to identify bullying in the workplace, support the survivor and address the bully while at the same time putting proactive strategies in place to prevent bullying.

Ethical responsibility: Bullying is a direct affront to ethics. It is therefore the responsibility of organisations to assert vigilance and address and minimise acts of bullying (Rhodes et al., 2010).

Feminism: Russell (1996) and Shefer (2008), cited in Dukas (2014), define feminism as an intellectual and political movement that is committed to challenging the socially and politically entrenched positions of gender inequality which disempower and subordinate women via traditional practices and attitudes. It is concerned with changing patriarchal, racist societies into those that are egalitarian, founded on mutual respect and collaboration and the fair distribution of power, resources and responsibilities.

Gender: The term is defined by Zucker and Bradley (as cited in Chrisler & McCreary, 2010) as an individual's sense of self as a male or female within the context of society. It is a social identity or social category with which an individual identifies, and through which he or she relates to others in that category, such as boy or girl (Chrisler & McCreary, 2010).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): IPA is an analytical tool in phenomenological research that is used to ascertain the personal meanings that people assign to their experiences, as perceived and reconstructed by them (Lemon & Taylor, 1997, in Tsartsara & Johnson, 2002).

Legislation: The South African Constitution and Bill of Rights (1996) provide guidelines and protects the rights of all people in South Africa to exercise and uphold respect for human dignity, equality and freedom (RSA, 1996). The Employment Act No. 55 of 1998, focuses on equity in the work environment by promoting equal opportunities and fair treatment in employment. It strives to eradicate unfair discrimination and stipulates affirmative action measures to restore the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, in order to ensure fair representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce. This is the only Act which comes close to dealing with corporate bullying. No other South African law defines or includes corporate bullying.

Occupational Social Work (OSW): OSW is defined by Googins and Godfrey (1985:398), as cited in Hughs, Olsen and Newhouse (2018), as "a field of practice where social workers attend to the human and social needs of the work community by designing and executing appropriate interventions to insure healthier individuals and environments" (Hughs et al., 2018:379).

Phenomenology: This is qualitative research method and philosophy aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of a person's own understanding of their experience of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). A phenomenological study aims to understand a person or persons' perspectives and insights regarding a particular situation or event. The current study aims to understand the perspectives of females regarding corporate bullying.

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT): Miller (1976) defines RCT as a psychodynamic framework for understanding human development with the assumption that the happiness and wellbeing of individuals are a product of the degree to which they participate.

1.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This first chapter of the thesis has provided an overview of the study, describing the problem statement, the goals and objectives of the study, key concepts according to the literature, the relevant theories, the research approach and methodology, the limitations, the ethical considerations observed in the study and a definition of terms.

The following chapter presents the literature review which focuses on the phenomenon of corporate bullying.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the literature that was selected to contextualise the study of women's lived experiences of workplace bullying (WPB). The studies selected for this literature review have the potential to deepen the contemporary South African social worker's understanding of WPB.

A literature review in qualitative studies aims to clarify misunderstandings or confusion regarding the nature and meaning of a perceived problem or phenomenon. It helps to build a framework for the research process (Rossman, in De Vos et al., 2005). This is done to assist with contextualisation.

In order to conduct the study, various perspectives on the phenomenon of corporate bullying were reviewed and are outlined in the first section of this chapter. The second part of the chapter examines Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) as a lens through which to view and understand corporate bullying phenomenologically.

2.2 DEFINITIONS OF CORPORATE BULLYING

Various authors have explored and described the phenomenon of corporate bullying. Lutgen-Sandvik (2004), highlights a few features such as "a repetitive, targeted and destructive form of communication directed by more powerful members at work at those less powerful" (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2004:472). Namie and Namie (2009:13) describe corporate bullying as "repeated, health-harming mistreatment, verbal abuse, or conduct which is threatening, humiliating or intimidating, or sabotage that interferes with work, or some combination of all."

Bullying occurs in various forms, direct and indirect, verbal and non-verbal. The most common types of bullying are isolation or exclusion, mocking, teasing, and devaluation of work performance and efforts (Einarsen, Raknes, Matthiesen & Hellesoy, 1994).

Yamda (2000) describes bullying behaviour as false accusations, rumours or gossiping, harsh criticism, screaming and tantrums, retaliation against the victim after they complain about the

intimidation, and lies about performance. Clients of hers reported sexual assaults, belittling, screaming and verbal attacks from a supervisor. The victims experienced severe symptoms of PTSD.

Einarsen et al. (1994), stated that corporate bullying refers to offending, harassing or socially excluding someone in such a way that it affects their work responsibilities negatively. Cilliers (2012) concurs, describing bullying as a learned and reinforced behaviour that causes intentional physical and psychological suffering and the misuse of power for psychological satisfaction at the expense of another (Agervold, 2007; Marais & Herman, 1997). Other authors give similar definitions (Leymann, 1996; Zapf & Gross, 2001; Einarsen et al., 1994). Common characteristics of corporate bullying include a power imbalance, repeated unwanted negative behaviour over time, a hostile environment, and health-harming behaviour (verbal or non-verbal). These conditions impact physically, emotionally, psychologically, financially and systematically. Although there are similarities, no two definitions are exactly the same, making bullying difficult and complex to identify in the workplace context.

It was debated by some scholars whether bullying happens over a period of time or in one instance of disconnection in the relationship emanating from a conflict (Leymann, 1996; Adams & Crawford, 1992). Hoel and Cooper (2001:4) explained that "the long-term nature of the phenomenon is one of the most salient features of the problem". The duration and frequency of the bullying behaviour gives an indication of the intensity of the perpetrator's actions and the impact on the target.

Einarsen et al. (1994) concur that bullying is not a single deed or isolated incident, but instead refers to persistent negative behaviour directed at one or more employees. Contrary to this view, Yamada (2000) argued that bullying can be defined by a single act.

2.2.1 Definitions of bully and bullying

Cilliers (2012:2) stated that the bully "is an individual or a group in a hierarchical position such as a supervisor, manager or leader who acts out of their low self-esteem, frustrated growth needs or hostility as opposed to being friendly". The actions of the bully are displayed in various forms such as physical, mental, emotional and verbal abuse. Cilliers (2012:2) describes the acts of a bully and the bully him/herself.

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"… irrational, unacceptable, disrespectful, offensive, humiliating and intimidating actions. The bully has a tendency to act out in front of others, shouting, using foul language, distracting the target from their work, with the intension to leave the target feeling powerless, ridiculed and incompetent, leaving the target to struggle with self-esteem and self-confidence."

In South African law, corporate bullying is not recognised as a term on its own. It currently appears under the umbrella term of harassment, defined by South African Labour Law as bullying, unfair discrimination and unwelcome sexual advances (RSA, 1998). However, Le Roux et al. (2010:53) challenge this and argue that "bullying in the South African context refers to any adverse or aggressive conduct that has the effect of creating a hostile work environment". They further suggest that bullying comprises "unwanted conduct in the workplace, which is persistent and serious, and demeans, humiliates or creates a hostile or intimidating environment or is calculated to induce submission by actual or threatened adverse consequences" (Le Roux et al., 2010:55, cited in Smith, 2014:32).

Smith (2014) cites Visagie et al. (2012:3), who made reference to Babiak and Hare (2006), who discussed the dynamics of bully and victim. They found that the bullies present themselves as masochists, sadists, narcissists, rivals and enviers with personality aspects that may be embedded in their childhood experiences, along with a need to control others. The need to control lies at the core of bullying behaviour, and although bullies may exhibit psychopathic tendencies, people with this behaviour are not classified as psychopaths (Smith, 2014:29).

Smith (2014) cites Namie and Namie (2004:316) who identified four types of bullies:

- The 'screaming mimi' is the bully who toxifies the workplace with mood swings and the initiation of fear
- The 'constant critic' is the bully who is obsessed with others' performance and constantly criticises others
- The 'two-headed snake' is the bully who climbs the corporate ladder by spreading rumours about others, aiming to divide and conquer
- The 'gatekeeper' is the bully who is fixated on control and power and guarantees the failure of the target.

It appears that bullying occurs at various levels; in top-down bullying, the bully is someone in a position of authority (a manager or supervisor); in bottom-up bullying, a subordinate is the bully; and in horizontal bullying, a colleague bullies someone at the same level.

Agtervold (2007) cites Hoel, Rayner and Cooper (1999:196-198), who highlight four aspects of bullying that help to define its intensity:

- frequency and duration
- the reaction of the target
- the balance of power and
- the intent of the perpetrator.

Smith (2014) argued that power and the intent of the perpetrator are the less significant of the four aspects. However, Cunniff and Mostert (2012) state that power issues and the imbalance of power is one of the driving forces behind bullying. Thus, power imbalances are evident in changes imposed on the party who holds less power; or when one person limits the fulfilment of the human potential of the other person; or the person's authenticity is limited by fear or threat of rejection or retribution. These relationships are predicated on the desire of the more powerful person to maintain or increase their power. Power imbalances are not in themselves a bad thing, but since power is so easy to abuse, the imbalance can easily become a key feature of the bullying relationship.

In the supervision and management context of social work, supervisors have a certain level of authority over the social worker, in order to ensure that the needs of the organisation and client are met. Authority is the power that line managers and supervisors execute to give instructions to subordinates to ensure that the objectives of the organisation are achieved. Bullying can occur when there is a misuse of power, with those at the receiving end being negatively affected by the behaviour and actions of the person in power, leaving the target feeling inferior (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012:3). On the topic of the power to bully, Salin (2008) states that the discrepancy of power does not always refer to people in authority and that power on the organisational hierarchy can also be obtained by having access to information, expertise or the support of influential people. This further indicates that bullying can happen at various levels; top-down or bottom-up or between colleagues, depending on the state of the bully and the target (Kaplan, cited in Smith, 2014:34).

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The abuse of power tends to make the targets feel incompetent to counter or even confront the bully. This adds to the difficulties experienced by persons in making use of existing grievance procedures. Hence, the targets might give up or resign or end up suffering in silence. In South Africa, Momberg's (2011) study highlights that line managers and supervisors are often the bullies, which makes grievance procedures difficult to process because of the apparent abuse of power. Similar incidents occur with management and human resource divisions that result in the target feeling or becoming insecure, fearful and uncertain about following through.

In a discussion of definitions and prevalence, Agervold's (2007) Danish study on bullying in the workplace quotes Leymann (1996:168): "It should be emphasized that the difference between conflict and bullying does not lie in "what is done or not done", but on the frequency and duration of what is done."

Leymann (1990) and Leymann and Gustafsson (1996) particularly speak to the fact that one can only be identified as a victim if one is subject to harmful bullying behaviour for a period of at least six months, therefore implying that health-harming behaviour occurring for fewer than six months is not considered bullying. In contrast, others, such as Keashley and Nowell (2002), have argued that it is unfair to make this distinction, as people may be exposed to bullying over a shorter space of time while still feeling strongly negative effects.

Einarsen et al. (1994) make no reference to the duration or frequency of bullying for it to be recognised as such. A further study conducted by Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) was then undertaken to determine how often participants were exposed to acts of bullying over a period of six months. The results were as follows: 41.8% had been bullied for a period of six months or less; 17.2% had been bullied for between six and twelve months; and 23.9% had been bullied for more than two years. The high percentage of participants who had been bullied for six months or less highlights the importance of taking into account the experiences of individuals who have been subjected to corporate bullying for shorter periods. The lower figures for longer periods of time may well suggest that victims of bullies tend to leave their places of employment to be free of the bullying. Thus, the view that bullying must occur over a period of at least six months to be considered bullying, as advocated by Leymann (1990), may be too limiting (Einarsen et al., 1994).

In discussing the duration and frequency of bullying, Agervold (2007) linked his assumptions to descriptions by Lewis (2006) and Lewis and Orford (2005), stating that bullying develops over time, with victims experiencing the behaviour as ambiguous in the beginning. Often the victim feels guilty and considers themselves the cause of the bullying behaviour, instead of defining the behaviour as bullying. Agervold (2007:165) agrees with Leymann's threshold of frequency and duration in the definition of bullying, the rationale being that there is a need to distinguish bullying from personal conflicts of a more sporadic nature. Agervold (2007) argues that if the criteria were more lenient, the incidence of bullying would appear much higher, and the concept of bullying would lose its weight and seriousness. Hence, according to this author, bullying refers rather than a few acts of aggression (Agervold, 2007).

Intent may be a consideration in bullying, even though it is difficult to prove. Intent in this context refers to the deliberate or conscious intention to hurt or intimidate someone. For Visagie, Havenga, Linde and Botha (2012:63-65), however, this aspect is not important. Agtervold (2007:163) argues that victims may feel bullied even though there was no intention by the bully to bully them, which suggests that apparent bullying may at times be a coherent and valid action by the company or organisation (Smith, 2014).

If we focus too much on identifying acts of corporate bullying, people begin to feel bullied even when they are not. This is called self-labelling. How companies or organisations inform their staff and create awareness about the phenomenon is therefore important. Therefore, clear distinctions need to be made between occasional acts of anger or displeasure, whether or not a power imbalance is at play, and bullying. For the most part, bullying is accompanied by a differential in power (whether recognised or not) and by a repetition of bullying behaviour over a period of time, although the time aspect may be debated. The concept needs to be conveyed clearly and managed correctly to avoid it being incorrectly identified.

In extensive research conducted on the impact of corporate bullying, Salin (2013) highlights that victims tend to find ways of coping. People may start drinking, revert to absenteeism, become ill more often, or take their frustration out on others. Family and friends are often the ones they complain to. There is an increase in stress which could lead to depression and anxiety.

Bullying may severely affect the job satisfaction and the health of both victims and organisations (Salin, 2001, in Smit, 2014:74). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one of the many symptoms that victims may experience.

2.2.2 Workplace culture as a contributing factor

Motsei and Nkomo's (2016) study entitled Antecedents of Bullying in the South African Workplace: Societal Context Matters became available after I first observed the relatively under-researched phenomenon in South African studies. Motsei and Nkomo (2016) found that employees are not the only ones affected by corporate bullying; its domino effect impacts entire organisations. The cost implications to companies and organisations are huge, as bullying contributes to a high turnover of staff and to industrial relations challenges.

The close relationship of bullying with labour relations is evident in issues such as poor-quality control and high absenteeism, which is consistent with international trends, as discussed by Salin (2013; also see Motsei & Nkomo, 2016). Motsei and Nkomo (2016) further identified the reward system and benefits as central organisational precursors to bullying. This involves the withholding of compensation and benefits such as bonuses and allowances that employees expect to receive after being promoted or working overtime. The assumption that follows is that those who do not reprimand those who withhold employee benefits support bullying behaviour. Motsei and Nkomo (2016) identify contributing factors to bullying in the workplace as internal competition, where employees compete for positions, and the setting of financial targets, which some employees may struggle to attain. In South Africa, the harsh economic conditions contribute to internal competition, and ultimately to bullying (Motsei & Nkomo, 2016:58).

Economic and social conditions place a strain on people, requiring that they work harder and do more with fewer resources, while performance expectations are often raised simultaneously. These authors (Motsei & Nkomo, 2016:58) state that government policies and the issue of unfair dismissal have not been sufficiently addressed and constitute part of the total scenario in which bullying occurs or is enabled to occur. They argue that structural organisational processes such as restructuring, downsizing and cost-cutting measures may be silent triggers for bullying, which is under reported. These organisational processes are motivated by growing operational efficacies. Several organisational restructuring processes that may be accompanied by bullying were identified by the participants in Motsei and Nkomo's (2016) study: changes in management or a re-shuffle in various teams or departments; changes in positions; the

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appointment of new people in newly created jobs; and side-lining of those perceived to be aligned with staff who have left (Motsei & Nkomo, 2016:58). In addition, the demand for diversity and equality in organisations may feed into bullying behaviour.

2.3 LEGISLATION RELATING TO THE WORKPLACE

In most other countries, including South Africa, the phenomenon is equated with unfair labour practices and/or constructive dismissal (Motsei & Nkomo, 2016:65). Constructive dismissal is defined in section 186 of the Labour Relations Act in subsection (1) (e) as 'an employee terminated a contract of employment with or without notice because the employer made continued employment intolerable for the employee' (RSA, 1995). It is important to note that the employee in this case would have to resign/terminate a contract of employment. Unfair labour practices are referred to in Section 186(2) of the Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995 as any unfair act or exclusion that arises between an employer and an employee involving –

- unfair conduct by the employer concerning the promotion, demotion, probation (excluding disputes about dismissals for a reason relating to probation) or training of an employee or relating to the provision of benefits to an employee,
- unfair suspension of an employee or any other unfair disciplinary action short of dismissal in respect of an employee,
- a failure or refusal by an employer to reinstate or re-employ a former employee in terms of any agreement, and
- an occupational detriment, other than dismissal, in contravention of the Protected Disclosures Act, 2000 (Act No. 26 of 2000), on account of the employee having made a protected disclosure defined in that Act' (RSA, 1995).

South African workplaces are protected by the Labour Relations Act (LRA), Act No. 66 of 1995, Sections 185, 186 and 192, which give detailed definitions of unfair labour practices and constructive dismissal. Constructive dismissal is understood as involving situations where employees feel forced to resign because it has become unbearable to remain in the workplace. It would therefore seem that how participants perceive bullying is shaped by discourses that were dominant during apartheid and that prevail in spite of the country's post-apartheid efforts to transform to a democratic and just society.

Corporate bullying is an umbrella term that in South Africa includes other negative acts such as harassment. In the South African context, the development of the concept of corporate bullying and sexual harassment may be attributed to the guidelines on harassment provided by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). These recognise bullying as a form of harassment (South Africa, 2011). However, bullying is increasingly recognised as different from other negative acts such as discrimination and harassment at work.

Two social systems are at play in the phenomenon of bullying; namely, the macro system (the social, economic and political conditions that prevail in a country) and the ecosystem (the immediate community or, in this case, the organisation). Bullying is more likely to happen where the macrosystem is dysfunctional in some way; where there is a high level of dissatisfaction, tension or violence in society. This is the case in South Africa, for various reasons.

My research made use of selected studies that were reviewed to contextualise the lived experiences of women and corporate bullying in contemporary contexts, including in South Africa. This review revealed that the phenomenon of corporate or workplace bullying is under researched, particularly in the context of social work studies and in relation to OSW and EAP.

In the next section, WPB is examined in the context of social work.

2.4 CORPORATE BULLYING IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK

Motsei and Nkomo (2016) concur with Salin's (2013) argument that the broader social, economic and political context contributes to bullying in organisations. Hence, they locate WPB in its broad social and cultural context. This includes a consideration of the roles played by gender, race, religion and education in relation to occupation. Of these, race and gender are the most prominent social indicators.

Du Plessis (2001) refer to pre-apartheid South Africa, when the welfare system, established in 1934, served the needs of the so-called 'poor white' population (Du Plessis, 2001). This was a time deeply affected by the unequal and unjust colonial system that was a forerunner to the later system of apartheid introduced in 1948, when extreme inequality became legislated. Owing to a slew of unjust laws that favoured whites at the expense of all other races, black and coloured people suffered economically, educationally, culturally and in terms of employment,

a situation that only found redress in 1994, after the democratic government was elected. Despite the introduction of the South African Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the latter still did not secure equal distribution of these historically unequal services, as privileged white recipients still receive better services rooted in historical preferential treatment of whites.

Pre-1994, the Nationalist government protected the jobs of skilled whites (including social workers), while 'poor whites' were employed in State-run organisations. This policy allowed social workers (mostly white) to enter workplaces and offer support services to (mostly) poor white working-class individuals in the form of material aid. Dealing with personal matters came later (Du Plessis, 2001). White social workers offered services to poor whites for many years, with the first black practitioner hired by the South African Iron and Steel Corporation in 1969. However, the mid-1980s were still characterised by a divide between black and white social work practitioners. Du Plessis (2001) concurs that the new, democratic government elected in 1994 was still working on addressing inequality in service delivery, access to and improvement of these services and, in doing so, had become more focused on larger developmental, educational and preventative services.

Models of OSW that are still in use are strongly influenced by North America and their Western definition of EAPs, which were developed for urbanised and industrialised countries and may not be applicable to the developmental conditions in South Africa. In South Africa rapid urban expansion, the rise in population and rural poverty continue to pose huge challenges to the government. The Department of Welfare has stated its intention of moving towards a more cohesive, developmental, community-based system for social work interventions (Du Plessis, 2001; 2013).

Occupational social workers in the workplace are often considered part of human resource management teams, with the need for social workers justified by the obvious links between employees' personal challenges and productivity in the workplace (Du Plessis, 2013). More occupational social workers were employed in South Africa after management and unions raised the need for deeper and broader care of employees. It was found that unions in South Africa do not sufficiently recognise mental health as a priority (Du Plessis, 2013), and have not made much effort to request or demand the employment of more social workers to assist in these matters. The responsibility for health and safety in workplaces belongs to managers. Even though social work is identified as the preferred profession for EAP (Du Plessis, 2013), many

other professionals, such as nurses, psychologists and HR personnel, may be involved (Du Plessis, 2010). Du Plessis further discussed how social workers report to more senior social workers in other spheres, but in OSW, they report to HR managers or medical practitioners, which results in challenges with professional supervision and consultation, growth and development.

Du Plessis (2013) attempted to provide answers to the matter of where social workers fit within an organisation and proposed that social workers should negotiate access across all levels of the organisation as relevant and needed in the various tasks they perform. This confirms that a social worker's relationship skills and ability to deal with all people, regardless of their position in the hierarchy, is what makes a successful social worker (Du Plessis, 2013). Others have reiterated this and further argue that although there are many challenges concerning supervision, it is an essential condition for maintaining the growth and development of the profession. This view aligns with the current retention plan for social workers of the South African Government (Department of Social Development, 2006, cited in Engelbrecht, 2010). Supervision is referred to as a management function and includes evaluation, enhancement of workers' professional functions, transferring of skills, mentoring, support and monitoring of services (Tsui, 2005).

Tsui (2005) lists seven important aspects of supervision:

- Interpersonal interaction - Supervision is a contract between two or more people on the foundation that one of the participants is an experienced and competent supervisor helping the supervisee deliver quality service to clients
- Agency objectives - Social workers need to be in alignment with the agency or company goals and to be accountable to a supervisor in that agency or organisation
- Flows of authority, information, and feelings - These allude to the three main functions of supervision. Administrative or organisational authority flows from the supervisor to the social worker; there needs to be a constant exchange of information and ideas between the social worker and their supervisor, and there needs to be state of emotional openness between the two parties, as social work is emotionally intense work and social workers need someone mature and competent with whom they can discuss feelings that arise in the course of their work
- Professional values - Supervision reveals and maintains the values of the profession

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- Job performance - Professional values, knowledge and skills are shared by the supervisor, who also offers support and monitors job performance

- Evaluation criteria - These need to include client outcomes and satisfaction, completion of the job and staff satisfaction with supervision. The criteria for evaluation also need to concur with the goals of the organisation and the expectations of supervision

- All involved parties - Supervision is a process that includes the organisation, the supervisor, the supervisee and the client (Tsui, 2005).

2.5 THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND MANAGEMENT

The role of HR is multifaceted in that services are delivered to different client constituencies, all with different expectations. HR practitioners are responsible for protecting the best interests of the employer and employees and should operate fairly when dealing with work-related matters. However, many employees distrust HR practitioners. Lewis and Rayner (2003) and Namie and Namie (2010) argue that HR practitioners seldom get involved in resolving bullying owing to pressure by various employees (including the bully) and loyalty to the company and management. On the other hand, Salin (2013), citing Branch, Ramsay and Barker (2007) and Cowan (2009), argue that HR practitioners play a vital role in the investigation of incidents of bullying, and should offer support to the victim and ensure that that correct protocols are implemented (Salin, 2013). It is therefore important for the company or organisation to have the correct policies in place and for all employees and managers to have a thorough understanding of the phenomenon, so that role identification is clear (Smith, 2014).

While harassment is a form of bullying, along with workplace violence or conflict, not all forms of these are covered in organisational policies or law (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011; Yamada, 2010).

Motsei and Nkomo (2016) drew attention to the societal context in which bullying occurs and offered relevant information to the current research project. According to their findings, restructuring and downsizing are breeding grounds for corporate bullying because employees become competitive for their own jobs. Restructuring happens after organisational changes occur where management and those in leadership positions are removed as part of decentralisation. In addition to these changes, opportunities are created for those in power to manipulate the system and employees' work profiles (e.g., through setting unreasonable

deadlines or increasing workloads). The abuse of power that occurs during organisational restructuring can easily lead to bullying.

2.6 EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES AND WELLNESS

Hillier, Fewell, Cann and Shephard (2005) examined wellness at work and ways in which the quality of our working lives may be enhanced. They explained that there is an increasing need for wellness activities, which, in my opinion, includes a need for properly funded EAPs in organisations. These programmes or related activities aim to help employees to become productive, decrease absenteeism, and improve and maintain staff retention. Being unwell is often displayed in behaviours such as fear, anxiety, aggression, low confidence, bullying and distress. These are behaviours that negatively affect an entire organisation. Workplace stress has been identified as an indicator of unreasonable workloads and unhealthy relationships with colleagues and/or management. Symptoms of unacceptable levels of stress in the workplace include various forms of mental illness, poor physical health, excessive smoking and consumption of alcohol, lack of or limited exercise, heart disease, and accidental or careless behaviours (Cooper, Liukkonen & Cartwright, 1996, cited in Hillier et al., 2005).

Not many workplaces have programmes that promote a state of psychological and physical wellbeing (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2012). EAP, which uses a training-based methodology in helping employees to acquire the skills that promote mental health, is an easy and cost-effective aid to employee wellbeing. The cornerstone of positive-psychology (PP), positive organisational behaviour (POB) and positive organisational scholarship (POS) is the promotion of positive traits, conditions and capacities (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2012).

The reviewed literature identifies the importance of 'being', stressing that EAPs can enhance productivity and decrease absenteeism and other behaviours that may add to distress in the workplace. It can be concluded from the reviewed literature that workplace bullying is complex; no single definition is presented in the literature. Furthermore, legislation on the issue is still being developed, while victims suffer the consequences of ambiguous definitions and legislation. What is evident from the literature is that workplace bullying is a common phenomenon, in need of scrutiny.

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2.7 RELATIONAL CULTURAL THEORY (RCT)

This section examines Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) as a lens through which to view the phenomenon of WPB from a social work perspective. My understanding of the phenomenon is also informed by my social work supervision and management experience, specifically the EAP and OSW context, and, as stated in Chapter One, by my own experiences of corporate bullying.

RCT was examined in the light of feminist principles, which form the other theoretical lens through which corporate bullying is understood. RCT is defined by Miller (1976), cited in Lenz (2016:415), and by Jordan (2008) as a contemporary psychodynamic framework for understanding human development based on the assumption that the happiness and wellbeing of individuals are a product of the degree to which they participate in growth-fostering relationships.

Several key assumptions of RCT have been studied; for example, the assumption that people grow through and towards relationships throughout their lifespan; that movement towards mutuality rather than movement toward separation characterises the mature functioning of people; that authenticity is necessary for real engagement; that full participation in growth-fostering relationships is important; and that all people contribute (Jordan, 2008).

This theory sheds light on many issues that confront women, "from language and its importance in theory building, to power as it interfaces with a relationship, and the imperative of feminist practice to address social change" (West 2005:94). It is imbedded in feminist theories and practices and is particularly relevant to issues faced by marginalised women (Jordan, 2017). RCT draws on feminist theory and allows for the investigation of new ideas and alternative views or truths (West, 2005). RCT and feminist theory are compatible in that both consider the experiences of individuals to be valuable (West, 2005).

In her 1976 book Toward a new psychology of women, psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller describes the power dynamic in many male-female relationships and the experiences of women in relation to the world. Miller acknowledges that relationships have been undervalued in traditional psychological theory and in practice, which has affected the ability of people to

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maintain healthy relationships. Miller (1976) argues that healthy relationships are vital for emotional health (Eible, 2015:29).

RCT developed further on the basis of work by five female practitioners in their publication, Monday Night Group. The group, consisting of Jean Baker Miller, Irene Striver, Alexandra Kaplan, Janet Surry and Judith Jordan, was established after the members had listened to many women speaking about their experiences, stories and thoughts (Jordan & Hartling, 2002; West, 2005). These professionals critiqued existing theories, especially those relating to women's contribution to culture. Such theories suggested that women are weak because of their need for relationships and that women are too needy and too emotional. In effect, women were made to feel embarrassed because of their need for emotional connection. The Stone Centre at Wellesley College in Massachusetts was subsequently established because of the ground-breaking work of these authors. RCT-related writings from the Stone Centre have since played a crucial role in the development of feminist therapy, combining relational and feminist understandings (Milgrom, Hait & Vogel, 2016). The Monday Night Group apparently had no intention of developing a theory. However, relationships were enhanced by engaging in feminist thinking with one another and exchanging ideas in various areas that were later developed into the theory now widely referred to as RCT (Eible, 2015).

The theory was initially called "self-in-relation theory" (Eible, 2015:29). Further data from Dawin, as cited in Jordan (2017: 233), suggests that only people who are aggressive and competitive thrive. According to this view, men and women are selfish and demand more from others than they give, for their own benefit. Self-interest is the primary motivation (Jordan, 2017).

RCT highlights that we move toward independence and autonomy through the development of meaningful relationships with others. We develop what Jordan (2008) calls a felt sense of self (Frey, 2013). This allows our psychological health and maturity to continuously progress throughout our lives. Frey (2013) further suggests that RCT emphasises social justice and the importance of relationships to human development. Contrary to RCT, the traditional perspectives argue that separation-individuation of the self is essential in order to achieve relationship intimacy.

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Jordan (2008) states that RCT is a framework for understanding human development, with the assumption that individuals achieve happiness and a sense of wellbeing when they engage in growth-fostering relationships. According to Jordan and Romney (2005:203), RCT emphasises the value of mutual empowerment, authenticity and empathy; to experience these qualities requires mutual influence, being open to being affected, and having the ability and willingness to give oneself fully to a relationship while being aware of an individual's potential impact on others.

The primary principle of RCT is thus that humans grow through and toward relationships throughout the lifespan (Jordan, 2017). It suggests that interdependence and mutuality is vital to healthy emotional development (Jordan, 2008). Interpersonal connections are based on mutual empathy, clarity, sense of worth, creativity and the desire for more connection (Jordan, 2017). RCT is therefore not value neutral. Culture is central to the model, which strives to highlight the multi-layered connections that belie the myth of separation.

RCT thus recognises our basic interconnectedness as humans and the fact that we need one another throughout our lives. This mutual neediness is not seen as a sign of weakness but our means of self-development and happiness. According to the theory, people need growth-fostering relationships, where both persons are open to being touched, moved and changed by each other. Five good things are said to come from growth-fostering relationships: a sense of zest when connecting with another; an increased sense of self-worth; the desire for more connection; increased knowledge of others and the self; and creativity and productivity (Miller, 1976).

From among the diverse forms of RCT, Lenz (2016) and Eible's (2015) understandings of RCT are most relevant to this study. Eible (2015) wrote from a social work supervision and management perspective, identifying nine key themes in the theory in the context of social work, including issues of race and culture. Although this is a US-based study, the reference to cultural diversity and the intersection of gender with race and class appear similar to the situation in South Africa and applicable in the organisational context. Some of the themes mentioned by Eible (2015) resonate with Motsei and Nkomo's (2016) understanding of the antecedents of bullying in the South African workplace. They also align with the views of Du Plessis (2010), who discusses the challenges of OSW in the South African context.

The nine key themes of RCT proposed by Eible (2015) comprise:

- Perceived mutuality - This implies having respect and being open to the sharing of actions, feelings, or relationship between two or more people while maintaining a sense of self. It allows for trust to develop (Jordan, 2017) and affirms that mutuality is established when both individuals grow and contribute to the relationship and to one another. Both participants engage in their personal growth, adding value while supporting and sharing in the growth of the other person.
- Relational authenticity - This implies having the capacity to bring an individual's genuine self into a relationship and being emotionally intelligent (Jordan, 2008).
- Relational images - This refers to an assortment of thoughts and experiences gathered from past relationships. RCT focuses on relationship experiences, all of which affect an individual's life and development. 'Past relationships and the growth, pain, or isolation experienced within them, result in "relational images" carried forward to other relationships' (Eible, 2015).
- Shame - This involves a feeling that one is no longer entitled to empathy or love.
- Relational connection - Connection is the experience of two or more individuals mutually interacting with one another. This would include mutual empathy and mutual empowerment.
- Disconnection - This involves the experience of a ruptured relationship, which may include hurt, disappointment, violation, a sense of being misunderstood or a sense of danger.
- Humiliation - This implies being made to feel unworthy of connection, placed in a power under position, where one feels devalued and disgraced (Hartling, Rosen, Walker & Jordan, as cited in Jordan et al., 2004).
- Mutual involvement - This speaks to the need to receive support from others and participate in one another's growth. Mutual involvement is not the same as dependency (Jordan, 2004).
- Violation or impasse - Lenz (2016) states that a lack of connectedness with others can lead to a sense of being isolated, confused and unsure about oneself and others.

In addition to Eible (2015) and Lenz (2016), expanded on RCT by drawing attention to the notion of a central relational paradox, which is the protective strategy of disconnection. The paradox is the fact that people desire a relationship while at the same time steering away from

relationships because of fear associated with the hurt of past relationships. This survival strategy allows the individual to modify themselves to match or meet the expectations of the other person, but at the same time to lose authenticity and mutuality, which becomes another source of disconnection.

Relational flow refers to a pattern of movement common in relationships, the cycle of connection, disconnection, the repair thereof and the move back to connection. When there is a possibility of reconnection, self-esteem remains intact, one can be authentic in the relationship, and trust is built that enables one to move into other relationships. It is helpful to practise relational awareness in situations where people are able to address concerns, failures, imbalances or pains affecting their mutuality, so that distrust does not become an issue and affect the new relationship, causing disconnection (Jordan et al., 2004).

When relational competence is the goal, connection is a priority. In such cases people will make every effort to foster growth-producing relationships. This is obtained when we are open to influence and emotionally available, when we exercise mutual respect and responsiveness while being aware of ourselves, know our own patterns of connection and disconnection, and allow ourselves to flow from disconnection back to connection (Jordan, in Jordan et al., 2004).

Further themes that feature in RCT are:

- Empathy - Relational theorists emphasise the need for understanding that, just as disconnection is inevitable in relationships, experiencing empathic failure is unavoidable. Empathic failure, however, can lead to great reconnection if awareness, trust and authenticity are present (Jordan, 2008:2). Having empathic understanding does not imply having only positive emotions, but rather committing to a fuller understanding of one's own and another's experience (West, 2005:105.) The other is seen as a dynamic, whole being, rather than defined by a single attribute or action.

  People handle conflict better when there is social empathy, and when they enter into their situations fully, and are able to detect inequalities and discrepancies and change these (Gerdes 2011). Mutual empathy helps to relieve an individual's sense of isolation (Jordan, 2010). It is suggested that empathy should be part of the policy-making process and part of the development of social programmes, which would allow for greater

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tolerance of differences and encourage open discussion concerning these variances (Gerdes, 2011).

● Humiliation - This is an extreme feeling of disempowerment – the individual feels undeserving of connection (Hartling, Rosen, Walker & Jordan, as cited in Jordan et al., 2004).

RCT suggests that groups and individuals are most productive and creative when fully engaged in authentic interactions and relationships (Jordan & Romney, 2005:203). RCT also focuses on three instrumental myths in relation to the way we have been socialised. An awareness of these myths can enhance the sense of 'self-in-relation'; poorly handled, they can diminish the significance of relationship.

These myths are:

● the myth of unilateral change (in an interaction, the less powerful person is changed);

● the myth that hierarchy and ranking produces incentives and that people assume their places in the hierarchy based on merit or virtue and

● the myth that power over others creates safety (Jordan, in Jordan et al., 2004).

A contributing factor to the societal and experiential value of relationships is cultural privilege. Individuals with cultural privilege in the United States present as more self-sufficient, healthier and more worthy of privilege than those with less cultural privilege, who are seen as needy and lacking. Those who lack cultural privilege and have different experiences and/or backgrounds may feel "less than" or "different from". Euro-American values are challenged by RCT, however, to suggest alternatives to defining value. RCT highlights that relational experience has more of an impact than societal expectations and meanings (Eible, 2015: 32).

What was originally known as the 'relational theory' was amended because relationships could not be viewed in isolation from the larger culture. Hence, the cultural aspect was added. A core assumption of RCT is to identify systems of oppression and give voice to men and women from marginalised populations. At the Stone Centre, the practitioners wanted to raise awareness of the influence of systemic power disparities which cause disruption of connection at both individual and societal levels (Jordan et al., 2004:3-6). By acknowledging the role of power and how it manifests in disruptions and disconnection between individuals and society, it

allows for the recognition of the overarching nature of structures that shape wider relational patterns.

Another fundamental aspect of RCT is the exploration of how societal structures can be improved to contribute positively to peaceful coexistence. The cultural aspect motivates that we grow toward a bigger capacity for respect, influence on the other, and openness to being changed by the other. Growth-producing relationships require shared participation in the relationship process, rather than a focus on the inequalities amongst individuals (Jordan, Hartling & Walker, 2004:3). It accepts that there are gaps and diversity in power relations, but still recognises and advocates for mutual empowerment. In the absence of mutuality, psychological challenges develop and give rise to violent conflicts (Jordan et al., 2004:3). According to West (2005:103), RCT stresses that the experience of disconnection disturbs our essential relational nature and contributes to the state of human suffering. On the other hand, when we work towards growth-fostering relationships, we encourage more relationship and connection through mutuality, which creates avenues for 'conflict transformation' (West, 2005).

2.7.1 Relational Cultural Theory and power

RCT refers to 'power over', whereby individuals with privilege conserve power by oppressing others. In contrast, the notion of 'power with' applies when there are collective efforts that stimulate creativity, action and growth. Walker (2008) argues that 'power over' alludes to the 'hierarchical paradigm' by which the opinions of the ostracised are silenced. He further explains that this silence is the result of an invisible support system in which society identifies those with less or no support as "less than, less capable, less competent, less challenging, less committed" (Walker, 2008:135). The theory maintains that the only way to overcome the 'power over' approach is to 'relate to and through the power that one has.

In the context of corporate bullying, it is clear that power plays a significant role. The supervisory or management role is predicated on power, among other qualities, and it is this power than is so easily abused. In the context of racial, cultural or gender relationships, the power dynamic is particularly worthy of examination.

2.7.2 Relational Cultural Theory as a lens for studying corporate bullying

In this study, RCT, as described above, was considered appropriate as a lens through which to view the lived experiences of women with regard to workplace bullying. As a theoretical framework for understanding social work supervision, RCT has the potential to provide a critical contextual lens through which the diverse relational themes of isolation, disconnection, distress and depression may be understood. These RCT themes were found to be evident in the participants' lived experiences and enabled me as researcher to interpret the experiences of both the bully and the target. An acknowledgment of these themes, ironically, may also enable emotional healing. The relational aspect of this theory stresses that self-esteem is built in relationship, not outside of it, which in itself has the power to minimise a sense of loneliness and psychological distress (Frey, 2013).

RCT may thus offer a contemporary and contextually relevant theoretical perspective that could benefit further research on social work supervision and management practices in SA. It focuses on the interactive quality of relational experiences, the personal restoration done within such experiences, and the prospect of future relational growth. It has particular bearing on the impact of gender, race and culture on relationships. As relationship building is a vital component of RCT, so too, should social work supervision enhance effectiveness with clients and the supervisor-supervisee relationship (Eible, 2015).

2.7.3 Relational Cultural Theory, mental health and corporate bullying

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2018), mental health is: '… a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.'

The DSM-5 is a publication by the American Psychiatric Association that uses a common language and standard diagnostic criteria, and is used globally by clinicians, i.e., psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, etc., for the classification of mental disorders. The DSM-5 assessment criteria concur with the above definition of mental health and add that the individual suffering from mental illness may experience physical symptoms such as digestive problems and chronic pain (APA, 2013). A person diagnosed with depression experiences the following symptoms: loss of energy, change in appetite (eating more or less), anxiety, increase or decrease in sleep, difficulties with concentration, indecisiveness, feelings of worthlessness,

guilt, hopelessness, and thoughts of self-harm or suicide. WHO further states that 76%-86% of individuals in low- and middle-income countries do not receive any treatment for their disorder. This may be a result of barriers such as lack of resources and trained health care professionals, and the stigma attached to mental disorders (WHO, 2018). Statistics from WHO indicate that more than 264 million people of all ages suffer from depression. Although depression is a treatable disease, it is a leading cause of disability worldwide and is said to affect more women than men (WHO, 2018). Statistics from the Australian National Survey of Mental Health & Wellbeing showed that 14.7% of the Australian workforce had a history of major depressive disorder. In total, 18% of women and 12% of men suffered from depression in Australia. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

From a South African perspective, statistics released by the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG, 2021) indicate that one in six South Africans suffers anxiety, depression and substance abuse challenges. They argue that less than 16% of individuals suffering from mental illness receive treatment. Furthermore, only 27% of those who report severe mental illness receive treatment and 85% of patients need to access the public health system. However, there are only 18 beds available for every 100 000 individuals. It is therefore apparent that the state of mental wellbeing in South Africa is catastrophic. SADAG also highlights that lack of resources, and the perception of stigma prevents treatment of depression and other mental disorders (SADAG, 2021).

In a cross-sectional study by Verkuil, Atasayi and Molendijk (2015), 33% of people who presented with mood disorders identified their work situation as the cause, which makes challenges at work the most common self-reported cause of depression (Hansson et al., 2010: 54-59). It is further reported by Khubchandani and Price (2015) that 2% to 30% of individuals have reported experiencing corporate bullying. Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) define corporate bullying as a situation where the employee (target) is mistreated and abused persistently over a long period of time, and struggles to defend him or herself against other/s in the organisation.

Corporate bullying presents in various forms which may include the setting of unreasonable deadlines, being assigned meaningless tasks, micromanagement, gossiping, verbal abuse, social exclusion and negative criticism (Ortega, Elipe, Mora-Merchan, Calmaestra & Vega, 2009; Nielsen et al., 2012).

Various authors including Nielsen et al. (2012) documented corporate bullying as a key source of distress that negatively impact the following variables: health and wellbeing; lowered job fulfilment and performance; decreased commitment; and higher levels of sickness absenteeism. Judging from the participants' experiences it seems that corporate bullying causes mental illness based on the link between corporate bullying and the variables mentioned above. The cross-sectional study conducted by Verkuil et al. (2015) concludes that 'corporate bullying is a significant predictor of subsequent mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety and PTSD symptoms and other stress-related psychological complaints.

It is important that companies or organisations positively invest in the wellbeing of their staff, which assists in the management and prevention of mental health concerns. This encourages employees to be happy and healthy and more productive and enables them to enjoy improved work and personal relationships (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). This in turn benefits the workplace and the wider community (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Keyes (2005) argues that an individual's experience of personal or psychological wellbeing is instrumental to living a 'good' or 'full' life. Strong interpersonal relationships (i.e., growth-fostering relationships) are one means to experiencing enthusiasm and joy (emotional wellbeing), positive functioning, self-mastery and personal growth. The Working for Wellness Programme states that using people's strengths promotes organisational and societal health (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Strengths as a concept may be understood in two ways: first, as positive character traits identified in the character strengths and virtues framework (e.g., gratitude, love of learning, curiosity, fairness) (Peterson & Seligman, 2004); second, as natural ways of thinking, feeling or behaving that are genuine and stimulating to users and facilitate optimal functioning, development and performance (Linley, 2008, cited in Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2012:1008-1009). Thus, strengths are a representation of a person's authentic self. Having and using these strengths promotes a sense of wellbeing (Brdar & Kashdan, 2010;).

Positive character traits and genuineness in interactions can be fostered through the pursuit of self-concordant goals. These are goals that are aligned with who we are and what we want to do in life, and that are interesting and meaningful to the authentic self. Three other credible avenues to wellbeing and the nurturing of personal strengths are "crafting one's job to be more in line with one's strengths, balancing one's skills and strengths with optimal levels of challenge to facilitate flow, and using one's strengths in relationships" (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2012:109). Job crafting comprises the efforts made by employees to align what they do and

how and who they do it with, with their values (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Research shows that people are happier and more satisfied when their values and passions are in line with what they do (Wrzesniewski 2003; Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001). When strengths are applied, their use invoke feelings of invigoration and excitement, and the desire for these feelings to continue through 'flow'. Flow refers to the enjoyable state of mind we find ourselves in when we are fully engaged in an activity. It arises from activities that represent the optimal balance between an individual's unique skills and the amount of challenge in a given activity, which brings about satisfaction. The final avenue through which strength is applied is relationships. Close relationships provide a supportive social environment that meets an individual's natural psychological needs, allowing for optimal growth and wellbeing (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008).

The concept of asserting and building strength through relationships is aligned with the essence of RCT, which emphasises that we grow through and toward relationships. As a result, connections develop mutual empathy, clarity, sense of worth, creativity and the desire for more connection (Jordan, 2017). In a relationship, both strive for optimal wellbeing.

2.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have examined workplace bullying through a feminist interpretation of Relational Cultural Theory, which sheds light on the relationships inherent in the workplace and in social work supervision. I have also examined the perspectives of numerous authors in relation to the theory, the workplace environment and the social work supervisory role. The importance of connectedness and growth-fostering relationships for optimum wellbeing in both personal and workplace relationships has been stressed. An examination of the literature has also revealed the theoretical and legislative aspects of social work supervision and management in South Africa.

The following chapter examines the theories used in this study in greater detail.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided an overview of the relevant literature to meet the first objective of the study, which was to broadly contextualise the phenomenon of women's lived experiences of corporate bullying. In conducting a critical review of selected literature on this topic, I found that Relational Cultural Theory provided a suitable gender sensitive analytical framework for the study (Rossman, in De Vos et al., 2011). The theory was used to build a contemporary understanding of workplace bullying from an occupational social work (OSW) and practitioner research perspective.

Chapter Three presents an exploration and description of the philosophical assumptions that underpin a phenomenological understanding of workplace bullying. The first part of this chapter provides an overview of debates on the evolution of phenomenology, particularly hermeneutics or Heideggerian phenomenology, from which the Interpretive Phenomenological approach (IPA) used in this study draws. The second part explains feminist phenomenology and the benefits of its application in social work.

3.2 PHENOMENOLOGY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

Phenomenology evolved as an alternative social scientific qualitative research method during the last decades of the twentieth century (Tuffour, 2017). The underlying philosophical ideas of phenomenology could be traced to Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Both were concerned with lived human experiences and the way things are perceived and appear to the consciousness (Tuffour, 2017). Over time, phenomenology has developed into a relatively established philosophical approach within qualitative research that appeals to a growing number of disciplines in the domain of public and professional practices, such as nursing, education, psychology (Tuffour, 2017) and social work (Pascal, 2010). There are ongoing philosophical debates on methodology in all disciplines, each with different argumentations about ways of knowing and understanding the world.

Several authors (Pascal, 2010; King & Horrocks, 2010) provide an overview of the broad discourse within phenomenology. Authors usually distinguish between two main traditions, i.e.

descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology. The first, descriptive phenomenology, is commonly associated with the philosophical ideas of Husserl, and the latter, hermeneutic phenomenology, with Heidegger. The general focus of the descriptive phenomenological approach is to examine 'the essence or structure of experiences in the way they occur to our consciousness' (Finlay, 1999; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Tuffour, 2017). In this type of research, the descriptions of the experiences encountered by participants are considered rigorously anchored to the data without the influence of external theory (Dukas, 2014). Studies following this approach are based on the philosophy of Husserl's phenomenology, which involves the principles of 'epoché, intentional analysis and eidetic reduction'. In simple terms, this means that the researcher is expected to adopt a phenomenological orientation to 'bracket' or 'put aside' his or her 'past knowledge or assumptions' (Tuffour, 2017).

A follow-up study by Heidegger led to further thoughts and new ideas that departed from the notion of bracketing. The change in perspective became known as 'the hermeneutic turn' or the 'interpretative' approach, assuming that such reduction is impossible (Tuffour, 2017). In social work research, interpretive methods or hermeneutics are simply understood as the science of interpretation, or finding the meaning of words (Sherman, 1991:70). Heidegger's 'hermeneutic turn' rejected the idea of suspending personal opinions or bracketing, arguing for an interpretation of subjective experiences. It acknowledges that for any interpretation to take place, there has to be an interpreter, which points in the direction of the subjective human element.
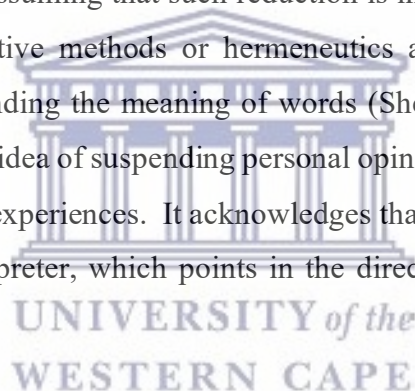
This new direction in phenomenological research further assumed that research findings are suffused with philosophical, theoretical, literary and interpretative lenses, resulting in an aspect of human experience grounded on unrestricted imagination and metaphorical sensibility (Tuffour, 2017). In support of Heidegger, Smith (2014) and Finlay (2011) identified other authors such as Gadamer (2008), Ricoeur (2000) and Lavinas (1981), who all became key advocates and associated themselves with the new hermeneutic approach.

Sloan and Bowe (2014), argue that phenomenology is best understood and used as epistemology, and a theoretical perspective is best used as methodology, while sometimes a combination of these may be used. Moreover, phenomenology comprises multiple strands, with different ontological and epistemological positions embedded in it, each with many complex, interlocking threads. There are as many styles of phenomenology as there are

phenomenologists. Embree and Mohanty (1997), distinguished four key strands of phenomenology, i.e. realist, transcendental and constitutive, hermeneutic, and existential phenomenology (Allen-Collison, 2011:03). More recently, Tuffour (2017) mentioned four contemporary phenomenological approaches which he claims do not neatly fit the Husserlian and Heideggerian or descriptive-hermeneutic divide that scholars identified in earlier work. He applied a fresh categorisation, referring to these four approaches as lifeworld approaches, first person accounts, reflexive, relational approaches, and the Interpretive Phenomenological approach (IPA).

Lifeworld approaches (LWA) resemble a descriptive and/or hermeneutic research approach, in that they explore how everyday experiences show up in the life world of individuals. This approach strives to find the intentional relationship between people's conscious, social, perceptual and practical experiences by analysing time, space, and the taken-for-granted presentation of experience (Tuffour, 2017). Key philosophers associated with this approach are Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleu-Ponty, Schutz, Van den Berg, and the two contemporary philosophers, Dahlberg and Ashworth (Tuffour, 2017).

In contrast to the LWA, in the first-person approach (FPA), researchers use their own subjective experiences and descriptive or hermeneutic approaches to examine the quality and essence of a phenomenon. This approach is inspired by the ideals of Husserl, who advocated that access to the world is through consciousness as experienced from the first-person perspective (Tuffour, 2017). Thus, FPA involves concrete narrative descriptions of momentous events interspersed with theoretical discussion and/or literary flourish, which places personal reflection at the centre of a detailed and deep analysis of experiences (Tuffour, 2017).

The third contemporary strand of phenomenology is the reflexive-relational approach (R-RA). In this approach, data and/or meanings are seen to emerge out of dialogue between the researcher and the participant, who is regarded as co-researcher in the embodied dialogical encounter (Tuffour, 2017). In such accounts, researcher reflexivity and researcher-participant (inter-)subjectivity is strongly emphasised. The latter approaches can be seen in the work of any of the major philosophers of phenomenology, but the works and ideas of Gadamer (1989), Gendlin (1994), Levinas (Moran, 2000) and Buber are particularly appreciated because of their dialogical and empirical overtones (Tuffour, 2017). Flowing from these four phenomenological approaches, various phenomenological-inspired research approaches have arisen that make use

of a variety of tools, ranging from pure description to pure interpretation; however, according to Tuffour (2017), the IPA is the modern way of conducting phenomenological research. Unlike other approaches, IPA is considered to have special appeal because of its commitment to explore, describe, interpret, and situate the participants' sense of their own experiences (Tuffour, 2017).

3.3 INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AS A 'CONTINUUM OF IDEAS'

In his discussion of the IPA as a contemporary qualitative research approach, Tuffour (2017) describes several basic features: first, he stresses the IPA's intimate connection with phenomenology, as a continuum of ideas; second, he stresses the IPA in relation to the hermeneutic turn as ideography; and third, he makes general criticisms. The IPA has been defined as an approach that seeks to understand the lived experiences of people, integrating the philosophical ideas and works of four major phenomenological philosophers; namely, Husserl (1970), Heidegger (1988) and Merleau-Ponty (1962). This integration of ideas was done to clarify phenomenology as both a singular and pluralist endeavour existing as a continuum of ideas.

A striking feature of the IPA is the performance of a detailed and systematic analysis of consciousness, drawing on the above-mentioned phenomenological ideas. Husserl (1970) believed that a researcher sets himself aside and detaches himself from prejudices, prior understandings (previous knowledge) and personal history, in the assumption that in hermeneutics, the examination of the thing itself is what matters.

The IPA, however, departed from the Husserlian notion that the ultimate human experience can be examined by setting aside pre-conceived knowledge. It dismissed this as simplistic and unrealistic, arguing that the pure experience argument advocated by Husserl is elusive and inaccessible, because events are usually witnessed after they have already happened (Tuffour, 2017).

3.3.1 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and the hermeneutic turn
As a philosophical and qualitative research approach, the IPA thus emerged by associating more closely with the hermeneutic tradition (Pascal, 2010), drawing on the ideas of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre to explore and interpret the personal lived experiences of the

participants (Tuffour, 2017). The ideas of the latter philosophers thus complement each other and collectively contribute to a mature, multifaceted and holistic phenomenology (Tuffour, 2017). For example, Heidegger's and Sartre's (1905-1980) phenomenology (in Grossman, 1984) is focused on existentialism, centres on embodiment. Together, these authors formulated the argument that we are embedded in the world of language and social relationships and that we cannot escape 'the historical accuracy of all understanding' (Tuffour, 2017:03; Head, 2013). Jones (2016:43) argued that Heidegger (1962) conceptualised human experience and phenomenology in terms of *Dasein* (1997) or 'being in the world', which refers to the 'inherent situatedness of all human experience within the context of the life-world' (Jones, 2016:03, citing Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 1996). Heidegger used the word *Dasein* to express the uniqueness of human beings, as opposed to other animal, or inanimate, existence. The literal English translation of *Dasein* is 'there being'; thus the implication is that we exist as individuals, but also within a social context. Heidegger believed *Dasein* to be our rootedness in the world as world beings. To 'separate the person from their experience through objectifying their experiences was erroneous' (Heidegger, 1996, cited by Pascal, 2010).

In contrast to Husserl's notion of 'the life-world', *Dasein* refers to state of 'being' specific to a particular individual, and hence an exploration of human experience. For Heidegger (1996), one must also consider 'the involvement of the enquirer him- or herself in the undertaking' (Jones, 2016:43, citing Moran, 2000:197). The assumption of the latter's involvement is that all individuals exist within social, cultural and historical contexts, creating an inextricable relationship between each human being and the lifeworld in which they exist (Jones, 2016:43). In Heidegger's view, *Dasein* is always already a part of this pre-existing world of people and objects, language and culture, and cannot be meaningfully detached from it (Jones, 2016:43, citing Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 1996:17).

In contrast to setting aside assumptions and/or biases through bracketing, researchers who follow Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology claim to explore the inherent inter-subjectivity of experiences, or the ways that the overlapping relationships in the lifeworld give meaning to those experiences (Jones, 2016; Tuffour, 2017; Pascal, 2010). Therefore, the IPA researcher embarks on studying *Dasein* by immersing himself/herself in the world of the participants through a lens of cultural and sociohistorical meanings (Tuffour, 2017:03).

Given this embeddedness and the intersubjective nature of the phenomenon of *Dasein*, Heidegger saw phenomenological inquiry as in need of both descriptive and hermeneutic elements (Jones, 2016:44). Hermeneutics and Heidegger's work call on IPA researchers to ground their stance in the lived world of things, people, relationships and language, and also to question knowledge outside interpretation. It argues that the interpretation of people's meaning-making of their experience is critical and fundamental to phenomenological enquiry (Tuffour, 2017:03). The 'hermeneutic turn' in phenomenology, as proposed in the literature, thus asks of IPA researchers to be more reflexive in their interpretations of findings, and in relation to their foregrounding of the phenomenon being investigated.

Following Merleau-Ponty (1962), the strand in phenomenology that focused on subjectivity, the essence of embodiment and our relationship to the world are also brought into sharp focus in the IPA (Tuffour, 2017). This perspective added another dimension to phenomenology, linking phenomenological description to the human being as a bodily being or body-subject (Tuffour, 2017). Central to this aspect of bodily-being, and important for this study on the under-researched phenomenon of corporate bullying, is what Tuffour (2017) referred to as the pivotal role played by perception in understanding and engaging the world. It was Merleau-Ponty (1962) who suggested that humans are unique and different from everything else in the world, and that they use their holistic sense to engage with the world. He suggested that that "empiricism has failed to adequately conceptualise the mechanisms of perception and judgement, and that it is essential to acknowledge human existence in shaping the elementary principles of knowing the world" (Tuffour, 2017:03). The lessons for IPA research from the assumptions of Merleau-Ponty's work are thus an acceptance of the vital role the body plays in knowing about the world (Allen-Collinson, 2011). Tuffour (2017) also argued that, while it is acknowledged that different phenomenologists place different emphases on the role of sensation and physiology in relation to the intellectual or rationale domain, the place of the body as an essential element in experience cannot be overlooked.

3.3.2 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and ideography

Another feature discussed by Tuffour (2017) is that IPA is fundamentally idiographic, which means that it involves detailed analysis of the phenomenon under investigation. Researchers claiming to follow this approach are expected "to carefully follow this idiographic approach throughout the analytic process for a meticulous detailed examination of the convergence and divergence between the participants' experiences" (Tuffour, 2013:03). The researcher must

carefully assess each case, offering a detailed, cautious analysis. IPA has the potential of being a forward-looking research methodology, offering opportunities for understanding and interpreting the experiences of people with practical and accessible guidelines to carry out phenomenological research. It also has methodological limitations, which some authors have pointed out.

Tuffour (2017) listed four major criticisms levelled at IPA studies: unsatisfactory recognition of the integral role that language plays; the approach's inadequacy to accurately capture the experiences of participants and the meanings of such experiences, rather than just opinions; and the fact that the IPA, like other phenomenological approaches, focuses on perceptions and is limited 'to understanding, as phenomenological research seeks to understand lived experiences, but does not explain why they occur' (Tuffour, 2017:04). Finally, the assumption that the IPA is concerned with cognition subjects it to criticism, as some aspects of phenomenology are not compatible with cognition and the role of cognition in phenomenology is not properly understood. This critique, according to Tuffour, has been countered by Smith et al. (2009), who argues that the IPA's 'prerequisite of sense-making and meaning-making which pre-supposes 'formal reflection' resonates with cognitive psychology' (Tuffour, 2017:04).

Researchers that adopt an IPA are thus cautioned about the active steps that are required to give voice to the experiences of the participants, and the need for sufficient interpretation of their narratives. They are reminded that the IPA is fundamentally a subjective research approach.

3.4 FEMINIST PHENOMENOLOGY

The criticisms and limitations involved in IPA resonate strongly with feminist theory and its general critical approach to mainstream scientific research, including assumptions about phenomenology.

The development of feminist phenomenology arose from work done by various authors such as Edmund Hussserl (1970), Martin Heidegger (1962), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), Judith Butler (1989), Iris Marion Young (1990), Sandra Lee Bartky (1990) and a few others, who related interpretive phenomenology to gender issues. Fisher (2000), in Baird and Mitchell

(2014), argues that Simone de Beauvoir was the initiator of feminist phenomenology in her work of 1949 to 1953, when she built upon the work of Husserl and Heidegger, paying attention to the role of language in understanding the world's meaning and the lived experiences of others.

Simms and Stawarska (2013) highlight six key features of feminist phenomenological research methods. First, human experience is to be understood in its interconnectedness with personal and cultural matters. Second, feminist researchers are critical of power structures embedded in academic studies, and attempt to develop other methods of gathering data and interacting with research participants to avoid the patriarchal status quo where women were removed from scientific theories (Gilligan, 1982, in Simms & Stawarska, 2013). Third, as a feminist researcher, one engages in reflexivity; one acknowledges one's own preconceived ideas and biases about the data and strives not to allow the data to be influenced by those ideas. Fourth, Finlay (2011) reminds us that we are connected to our participants. This inter-subjectivity allows us to hear the voice of the participant more sincerely. Feminist researchers aim to empower women and through the process enhance the lives of participants. Eva Simms' (2000) colleague Constance Fisher (2005) referred to this as the 'Prometheus principle', whereby participants are treated with dignity and respect, and as 'experts in their own right'. Participants should always be providing with the results of the study. Lastly, feminist language is a trademark of feminist researchers, in that the voices of participants are to be heard in the study, with attention paid not only to the spoken word but also to what is not said, including the emotional content revealed through facial expression, gesture and emphasis (Head, 2013).

Garko (1999) highlights a number of reasons why phenomenological studies (particularly those involving female participants) are methodologically compatible with the salient values and principles that underpin feminist theory. Specifically investigating and understanding the everyday world of women's lived experiences is paramount in feminist and phenomenological studies alike; both feminist and phenomenological orientations are committed to openness, description and understanding, and both denounce the assumption that absolute objectivity is possible, or that a true subject-object dichotomy can exist (Dukas, 2014).

Thus, phenomenology and feminism mutually inform and enrich each other (Langellier, 1994). Feminism encourages a phenomenological analysis of women's lived experiences within the framework of a society constructed on social differences and inequalities. Phenomenology

cautions against merely imposing feminist interpretations on women's lived experiences (Dukas, 2014:72).

Historically, feminist phenomenology established itself as a critical phenomenology (Head, 2013). Feminist thinkers found themselves having to think in categories and concepts created by males who used the experiences of men as the norm and the cornerstone for epistemological or knowledge-based practices (Head, 2013). Owing to male dominance in research, scholars attempting to conduct feminist research often critique their own intellectual history, as well as the institutions which produce knowledge (Head, 2013). While striving to be critical of male dominance and patriarchal ideas, feminist phenomenology seeks to describe and conceptualise gendered existence and to create a space where women's voices may be heard (Head, 2013:16). It has been argued that feminist phenomenology finds itself having to balance the hermeneutic discipline of suspicion (of existing discourse structures) with the hermeneutic discipline of affirmation and empowerment (of the complexity of individual, situated, gendered life experiences) in order to find a place for ethical, non-patriarchal political action on behalf of women, men and children (Head, 2013: 16).

The research population for this study comprised of women from various backgrounds who had in some way been exposed to or impacted by corporate bullying. In incorporating the feminist and the phenomenological perspective, I acknowledged the role of context and language with regard to power imbalances and strove to remain sensitive to each participant's lived experience of the phenomenon.

3.5 FEMINIST RESEARCH PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

There are six key insights or practice principles in feminist phenomenological research that are important and relevant to this social work study to build understanding. First, feminist research practice assumes a basic understanding that 'human experience is embodied, inter-subjective, and contingent, and woven into personal and cultural webs of signification' (Head, 2013:17). Hence, the experiences of participants have to be treated with interest, respect and compassion, but they also have to be interpreted critically. For example, the feminist phenomenologist researcher does what is referred to as 'double book-keeping' by observing not only what the participant says, but also by uncovering or paying attention to silences or what she/he does not or cannot say, exploring the structures of her conversation/narrative or discourse. Second,

feminist research is generally critical of the power structures inherent in academic disciplines (including social work) and attempts to construct alternate ways of gathering and generating data through interactions with research participants. It assumes that mainstream science and the scientific production of knowledge and procedures is suspect, and that it reinforces the dominance of the patriarchal status quo.

Third, feminist researchers engage in the practice of reflexivity, which involves procedures to assist with becoming aware of our own stereotypes, preconceived ideas and prejudices, and to clarify the role played by researchers in participation and in the co-creation of research data with participants. Fourth, feminist approaches are mostly relation-centred, challenging the mainstream view of 'the bounded, masterful, isolated self'. It assumes that as researchers we are indirectly connected to our participants 'even entangled', and 'our phenomenological epoch demands that we become aware of it and acknowledge this (Head, 2013:18). The predicament of entanglement is not a condition to be ignored or something that needs to be erased but should be acknowledged. As argued, 'our inter-subjectivity, our *Ineinander*, our co-existentiality can function as a tool for hearing the voice of the other more genuinely' (Head, 2018:18).

Fifth, feminist research generally sees itself as 'a tool for the empowerment of women' (Head, 2013:18). The research process and results are assumed to be imbued with the potential to enrich or enhance the lives of research participants directly, and thus it is important to treat participants with dignity, respect, and as experts in their own right. It is also important to give the results back to the participants in an appropriate form. This tenet distinguishes the approach as having political, educational or liberating effects. Finally, feminist research attempts to develop a different voice for articulating and presenting data (Head, 2013:18). Alternative ways may be photo stories, case studies, documentary films or other media apart from reports, etc. to depict the full context of participant experiences and research situations. 'Subtle, textured descriptions, plenty of room for the participant's own voice, and awareness of the unsaid within what is said are the hallmarks of feminist language practice in qualitative research' (Head, 2013:18).

The idea that phenomenology belongs to the field of feminist concerns and benefits from an engagement with other disciplines assumes a more critical, progressive and broader understanding of what phenomenology is, according to Head (2013). Several other authors

concur that where there are questions which include gendered experience and sexual difference within a field of study, phenomenology is feminist.

Most feminist authors agree that the origins of feminist phenomenology (FP) date back to the French feminist, Simone de Beauvoir, and her classic text, *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, 1949/1989). This book, situated within French philosophy and crossing many boundaries, is considered a founding text in the phenomenological tradition. This is attributed to 'its admixture of narrative accounts of women's lived experiences with a global outlook on women's subordination in society' (Head, 2013:07). Prior to this seminal work, other sources that are often cited as contributing to FP are the ideas of Stein (1930s), who addressed the question of human types and gendered identities. Stein's approach has been described as a properly philosophical/phenomenological interrogation, which combined an interest in the universal categories of experience with the political cause of women's access to appropriate education, as well as spirituality (Head, 2013).

Several other influences on FP are also regarded as relevant to understanding the development of the FP theoretical approach. These influences include the contributions of the German-American Hannah Arendt and her reflections on human action's dependency on natality and the event of birth, as described in *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1958/1998; Head, 2013). However, the French feminist scholar Luce Irigaray's engagement with the phenomenological tradition through Merleau-Ponty (2010) and Levinas (1995), and the inclusion of pre-discursive experience in her own thinking, was what directed discussions to focus on a relationship between phenomenology and the French feminist tradition in the 20th and 21st centuries. According to Head (2013), this was evident in the work *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* by Irigaray, (1993). Thus, as argued by Head, elements of feminist phenomenology have been encountered in the writings of contemporary women philosophers in the continental European tradition for a long time – even if the authors did not adhere to feminist or phenomenologist labels.

This review of FP in terms of the value it added to research studies and to interdisciplinary dialogue is of great significance to the current social work study on workplace bullying. Head (2013) further argues that as an interdisciplinary feminist phenomenologist, one adds value by bringing conceptual resources to bear on the empirical material, understood as a phenomenon endowed with meaning and in need of interpretation. This statement concurs with the views of

several other authors such as Merleau-Ponty (1962), Tuffour (2017) and Butler (1989), who show that phenomenology has been around in the past century, adapting and responding to the pressing philosophical questions of its time, widening its scope into what is termed continental philosophy. We have moved through the existential turn with Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty; through the hermeneutic turn with Gadamer, Habermas and Ricoeur, through the post-structuralist turn with Foucault and Derrida, through the ethics/ event turn with Levinas and Deleuze, and through the feminist turn with Beauvoir, Irigaray and Butler (Head, 2013).

A critical phenomenology, as pursued and promoted through FP, thus understands the contingencies of human experience and consciousness and works on understanding the pervasive influences of ideology, politics, language and power structures as they construct and constrain the lived experiences of people (Head, 2013:15).

The strength of feminist phenomenology lies in its interdisciplinary appeal (Head, 2013). It can certainly enrich social work and the study of corporate bullying. On the one hand, it is an abstract system in the history of philosophy, while on the other, it creates new ideas which allow a clearer understanding of human experience and meaning. Further to this, Husserl regarded phenomenology as a method to provide a deep understanding of the richness of phenomena as they present themselves to human consciousness (Husserl, 1952, cited in Head, 2013:11).

The current study, with its goals of both describing and interpreting the lived experiences of women in relation to workplace bullying, thus used an IPA approach in the interpretive tradition. Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) argue that phenomenology deals with human existence and how phenomena are discovered in consciousness and lived experiences. It looks at how we understand our experiences within the world.

Phenomenology is concerned with knowledge of the world and is further described as a philosophical approach to studying human experience. The emphasis is on how individuals experience the world and also on how individuals make meaning of and understand it (Creswell, 2007; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It focuses on subjective, first-person experience and is a logical account of what appears in the experience of phenomena (Newberry, 2012).

Pascal (2010) explains that Husserl was focused on the participant's life world (*lebenswelt*). He professed that the way to knowledge is 'back to the things themselves'. Dukas (2014) has extensively reviewed the literature on phenomenology. In *A Feminist Phenomenological Description of Depression in Low-Income South Africa*, she elaborates on Husserl's lifeworld, arguing that it comprises the 'world around us, as we perceive it, as well as our qualitative experience of our self and our personal encounters' (Dukas, 2014:17). The lifeworld, according to Husserl, was described by Finlay (2008) as being pre-reflective and as happening before it is thought or spoken of, thus pointing to an individual's lived experience and actual social context, as opposed to their inner world of introspection. This type of research helps us to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of human beings. Perceptivity is another key concept, highlighting that when a researcher is collecting and analysing the data it is only from a certain viewpoint. Thus, we cannot have the full view of anything, which once again implies that as researchers, we need to be aware of our own bias and to practise reflexivity.

I was cautious and aware that I will only gain a full understanding of phenomena through the process of bracketing which involves detaching oneself from one's own views and prejudices when analysing the participant, the experience or the story. Furthermore, bracketing presumes that the researcher would and should isolate knowledge from experience (Pascal, 2010). Finlay (2008) and Giorgi (2012) acknowledge that the process of bracketing aims to lessen bias and creates an opportunity for the emergence of new meanings and understandings. The researcher attempts to set aside own assumptions and with an open mind pays close attention to the views of the participant and their experience (Finlay, 2008). Martin Heidegger argued that the person was a 'being-in-the-world' and therefore could not be separated from the world. We cultivate meaning through our life experiences and shared humanness (Pascal, 2010). Heidegger argued that instead of bracketing, we should conduct a process of reflection in order to become conscious of our own bias or assumptions and let go of these. This was Heidegger's ontological variation and was the foundation of the 'hermeneutic turn', in that we would no longer gain clarity through shared experience and meaning (Pascal, 2010).

We are so consumed in the world we live in that our experiences are linked with social, cultural and socio-economic frameworks. To be able to understand these experiences, we must be objectified so that understanding becomes the moment when life understands. The concept of phenomenology as described by Heidegger has similar qualities to that of social work. The

approach was applied to this study as I aimed to understand and explore the lived experiences of women in relation to a social and cultural phenomenon – corporate/workplace bullying.

A review of the contribution that Pascal (2010) made to social work perspectives on phenomenology reveals that she reinforced Heidegger's being-in-the-world and related it to the social work concept of person-in-context, arguing that the person cannot be separated from the world. The one cannot exist without the other.

Heidegger explained that *Dasein* is temporal; that we as human beings exist within our own personal and social historical framework, which is understood as the past, present and future. 'In the context of everyday life, our moods are uncovered from our past, the present manifests through language and meaning, and the future is projected as indefinite until death' (Watts, 2001, in Pascal, 2010). Like the feminist phenomenological approach discussed earlier, Pascal's (2010) research builds on Heidegger's approach to phenomenology, since it has areas of commonality with the practice of social work. Heidegger identified the social and historical context of individual existence, taking a structural viewpoint. A less pathologising stance was encouraged owing to a recognition of wider influences. Social workers are reminded that life changes and, through temporality, there is a developmental unfolding of life, including death, which goes far beyond the historical framework (Pascal, 2010). Heidegger's approach was humanistic and recognised the individual in context of their lifeworld. Being-in-the-world was seen as a holistic phenomenon understood as the intersubjectivity of connectedness and interdependence in human relationships (Cohen, 2002 in Pascal, 2010), with which feminist phenomenologists concur.

Ramsay (1999) argues that social workers should adopt a holistic view, 'concentrating on the multiple, reverberating transactions between people and their environments'. Furthermore, the impact of the environment is bi-directional, in that people are affected by their environments but also have the capacity to change them. Part of our role as social workers is to empower individuals to change. This brings us to the definition of social workers.

The following definition was developed by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (IFSW, 2000: 409):

"The social work profession encourages social change, problem-solving in human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people to improve well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the point where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work."

Shaw and Gould (2013:3) argued that social work research should add to the development and evaluation of the profession and its services. Beyond that, it should enrich the moral purpose, strengthen the disciplinary character and location, and indorse enquiry marked by rigour, range, depth and the advancement of social work.

This research study focused on these important elements of social work, with specific attention paid to better understand the phenomenon of bullying in the work environment, particularly women's experiences. Phenomenology can be applied to feminist analysis, as described by Simms and Stawarska (2013; 2016), whose study included questions related to gendered experience. I aim to explore and to better understand workplace bullying in more detail, uncovering how it affects the individual and the world around them by using Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has expounded on phenomenology as the basis of the approach used in this study, showing its relationship to IPA and to social work. Particular attention was paid to feminist phenomenology in order to better understand the phenomenon under investigation, which is the lived experiences of women in relation to workplace bullying, which is clearly shaped by cultural and social forces.

The following chapter presents the research methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research methodology that was followed in this study. The paradigm used for the study was phenomenological, examined using the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) located within a qualitative research design. This chapter discusses the research setting, population and sampling, data collection, data analysis and research instrument used. In the discussion of data analysis, a detailed account is given of the steps followed. I drew on different perspectives of IPA and feminist theory, which were used to contextualise the lived experiences of women in relation to corporate bullying. In order to gain a more meaningful and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, my discussion of the methodology argues that feminist theory can add value to research by assisting social work research studies to be more reflective. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the trustworthiness of the data and the methodology used, which included practices to ensure reflexivity.

4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: A FEMINIST UNDERSTANDING

Social work research has an ethical and political aspect which always includes protocols for research techniques and methods. These methods influence how we explain a research problem, structure research questions, choose a design and understand the assumptions or outcome of the results. Social work research is not only about collecting knowledge; it is also our responsibility to advocate and achieve social justice, and to help change the circumstances of the individuals, groups and communities with which we work for the better (Engel & Schutt, 2016).

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as an exploration of people's lived experiences of a particular phenomenon, in which the researcher shows sensitivity to the subject matter and seeks to understand participants' experiences by interacting with them in their environment or natural setting. This allows researchers to gain insight and details about the feelings, thoughts and perceptions participants have of their experience (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). I concur with this understanding, that qualitative methods favour naturalistic observations and interviews, implying a degree of closeness, and that as a researcher that I

should represent the complex worlds of the respondents in a holistic, on-the-ground manner. Thus, to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the participants, information was gathered through a process of interviews, life stories and reflexivity measures.

Qualitative research has been defined as first-hand involvement with the social world (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). First-hand thus refers to the context of exploration or the immediate on-site setting in which qualitative methods are employed, and involvement refers to how the researcher engages in the social world that is being studied. The researcher therefore plays an active role in the lives of the participants and their natural environment, allowing rich, descriptive and contextual information to be collected (Holosko, 2001).

Holosko (2001) further argues that the purpose of qualitative social work research is to produce descriptive information by means of the individual's own words and an honest description of his or her behaviour and actions. The study topic may be a client, individual, family, event, behaviour, agency, organisation, and/or culture. The epistemology is therefore primarily phenomenological and works from an inductive point or general perspective, rather than a hypothesis. This means that the study, as it progresses, will develop a specific conclusion, set of questions, hypotheses, or grounded theory (Tutty, Rothery, Grinnell, 1996, cited in Holosko, 2001).

Several characteristics of qualitative research have been identified by different authors. For example, qualitative research involves human behaviour and actions that take place in their natural settings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001: 147), while the primary instrument in data collection is the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:87). The focus is on the interpretation of participants' views and experiences, and their reasoning and meanings ascribed to those experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:87).

4.3 FEMINIST PHENOMENOLOGY AND IPA AS RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Larkin and Osbourn (2011) describe phenomenology as the philosophical study of 'being'. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) points out two important aspects of the approach: namely, transcendental knowledge and hermeneutic phenomenology. Through transcendental phenomenology, Husserl aimed to identify 'core structures' in society through a process of bracketing. Bracketing is a process whereby the researcher withholds conventions relating to

history, culture and context to focus on a more universal approach to a particular phenomenon. Husserl (1859-1938) defined phenomenology as the study of raw and original experience of the world as it appears. The experience can be identified consciously through the instantaneous authentic reality of everyday life.

Simms and Stawarska (2013) highlight six key features of feminist phenomenological research, which are discussed in detail under 3.4.

Human experience is to be understood in relation to personal and cultural matters. Feminist researchers are critical of power structures embedded in academic studies and attempt to develop other methods of gathering data and interacting with research participants to avoid the patriarchal status quo where women were removed from scientific theories (Gilligan, 1982, in Simms & Stawarska, 2013). As a feminist researcher, one engages in reflexivity; one acknowledges one's own preconceived ideas and biases about the data and strives not to allow the data to be influenced by those ideas. Finlay (2014) reminds us that we are connected to our participants. This inter-subjectivity allows us to hear the voice of the participant more sincerely. Feminist researchers aim to empower women and through the process enhance the lives of participants. As such it is important that participants should always be provided with the results of the study. Also, feminist language is a trademark of feminist researchers, in that the voices of participants are to be heard in the study, with attention paid not only to the spoken words but also to what is not said, including the emotional content revealed through facial expression, gesture and emphasis (Head, 2013).

Baird and Mitchell (2014) conducted a study using feminist phenomenology to explore women's experiences of domestic violence during pregnancy. Their description of feminist theory and their use of feminist phenomenology has a bearing on the current study and was useful for shedding light on the way in which a phenomenon may be understood according to a feminist phenomenological approach.

Feminism has all-encompassing principles, one of which is that gender is intertwined with social status, with males holding positions of greater power than females because of the different roles they play in society and because they view life differently. As a feminist researcher, my identity as a female social work practitioner and researcher is worthy of acknowledgment, since according to the principles of phenomenology, I cannot entirely bracket my own identity and position in the process of research. Moreover, creating awareness and

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sensitisation, along with advocating for change in the lives of women (e.g., in social, political and health policies) are the main determinants of feminist research. Women's experience of corporate bullying is the issue raised in this study and because of the sensitivity of the topic, I implemented it to allow the participants to speak freely about their experiences, and to have those experiences understood and respected.

Phenomenology, the methodology used in this study, is a philosophical approach to studying human experience. This approach allow for a logical account of what appears in people's experience of phenomena (Newberry, 2012). The emphasis is on how individuals experience the world and on how they make meaning of and understand it (Creswell, 2007). It focuses on 'subjective' first-person experience (Newberry, 2012).

Research following the IPA does not test hypotheses (Larkin & Thompson, 2011), but aims to explore how participants make sense of their personal and social world and looks at the meanings people ascribe to their experiences and events (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The approach stresses the active role of the researcher.

As a feminist phenomenological researcher, I gained an 'insider perspective' to make sense of the participants' personal worlds, while simultaneously noting my own perceptions through interpretation, which led to a process of 'double hermeneutics' (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010:255, in Dukas, 2014). This process of interpretation involves listening to participants trying to make sense of their world, while the researcher concurrently tries to make sense of the participants' words (Packer & Addison, 1989; Palmer, 1969; Smith, in press; see also Chapter 2 in this study). This 'double hermeneutics' helps the researcher to interpret the views of the participant while also offering support and asking critical questions that will elicit a deeper understanding of the impact of the phenomenon.

Larkin and Thompson (2011) state that the IPA is concerned with meaning and process rather than events and causes, and ideographically points toward a particular phenomenon, rather than general phenomena. In this case, the particular phenomenon is corporate bullying.

The IPA recognises a link between an individual's thinking, feelings and emotional state. Through the interpretation process, the researcher identifies whether the participants' cognitive and emotional expressions and explanations actually are what the participants say they are.

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The methodology presents four major conceptual and practical limitations:

- It provides unsatisfactory recognition of the integral role of language (Willig, 2008). Meaning making takes place in the context of narratives, discourse, metaphors, etc. Although the primary purpose of the IPA is to gain insight into experience, it is always entwined with language (Smith, Flowers & Larkin. 2009).

- When phenomenology is viewed as a philosophy, it is associated with introspection, which allows the philosopher to discover experiences through 'phenomenological meditation', whereas, if viewed as a research approach, the quality of results depends on the interpretations of participants and the experiences of researchers (Willig, 2008).

- Third, the fact that the IPA focuses on perceptions can be tricky and restrictive to our understanding, as phenomenological research aims to understand lived experiences but does not explain why they occur. In order for it to be an authentic research inquiry, we need to understand the experiences of participants and the conditions that triggered the experiences, which are located in past events, histories or the social-cultural domain (Willig, 2008). Smith et al. (2009) argue that the IPA uses hermeneutic, idiographic and contextual analysis to understand the cultural aspect of people's experiences.

- Lastly, the IPA claims to be concerned with cognition, exposing it to criticism, since some aspects of phenomenology are not compatible with cognition, and the role of cognition in phenomenology is not properly understood. However, Smith et al. (2009) denied this, arguing that the IPA's prerequisite of sense-making and meaning-making, which encompass formal reflection, clearly resonates with cognitive psychology.

In summary, it has been shown above that, even in the presence of a solid philosophical foundation, many IPA studies are still conducted badly. Consequently, researchers who are planning to adopt the IPA are advised to take active steps to give voice to the experiences of the participants, followed by sufficient interpretation of their narratives. It is important, though, to bear in mind that the IPA is fundamentally a subjective research approach, so two analysts working with the same data may come up with different interpretations (Smith et al., 2009; Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

The IPA has been disparaged for its ambiguities and lack of normalisation (Giorgi, 2010). It is said to be more descriptive than interpretative. Having said this, I was persuaded to use the IPA in this study because the aim and objectives of this study pointed me in this direction.

4.4 RESEARCH SETTING

The study was conducted in the Cape Metropole of the Western Cape, which stretches from Gordon's Bay to Atlantis. The area includes urban, rural and peri-urban communities, but this study took place in urban areas.

Participants were recruited from both private and public organisations, which included institutes of higher education, government hospitals and private companies involved with Occupational Health and Safety, HR and agriculture. Neuman (2007) indicates that the researcher needs to consider three features: the richness of the data, familiarity with the terrain and suitability when choosing a study site.

4.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Babbie and Mouton (2001) state that the target population as the total group of people to be studied. For the purpose of this study, the population was a group of women employed in various sectors in the Cape Metropole in the Western Cape Province in South Africa. The target population was homogenous in one respect, all being survivors of corporate bullying; in other respects, however, they came from all strata of society and a variety of sectors. The research participants comprised women from various occupations and various psycho-social backgrounds. Only women were considered because only women had reported corporate bullying at the place where I was working as a professionally registered social worker at the time.
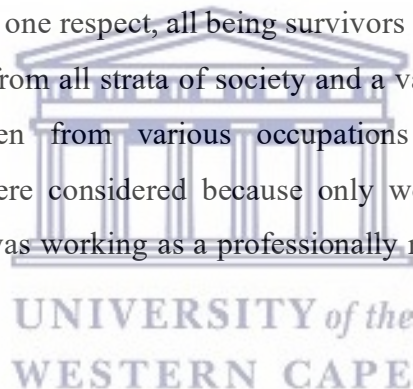
4.5.1 The sample and sampling method

A sample is a small group belonging to the target population that is representative of the population (Bradley, 2013). In this study I used snowball sampling as my method for selecting a sample. Vogt (1999), cited by Atkinson and Flint (2001), defines snowball sampling as a technique for finding research subjects. One subject provides the name of another, who provides the name of another, and so on. Snowball sampling is often used in explorative and descriptive studies, and those with 'hard-to-reach' participants such as sex workers or drug dealers. Berg (1988), in Atkinson and Flint (2001), further explain that snowball sampling is based on the notion that there is a 'link' between the initial sample and others in the same target population, allowing for all referrals to remain within a circle of acquaintance (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). This process is also known as 'accumulative' sampling, and the terms 'chain

referrals' and 'respondent-driven' also apply, contributing to an understanding of the technique (Bieranacki & Waldorf, 1981; Heckathorn, 1997; Patton, 1990; Spreen, 1992).

Snowball sampling is subject to bias, in that respondents with more links are more likely to be recruited into the sample. However, respondent-driven sampling also allows the researcher to make estimates about the social network connecting the hidden population (Katz, 2006).

Snowball sampling is valuable when respondents are few in number or where some degree of trust is required to initiate contact. This 'chain referral' strategy allows the researcher to be seen as an insider or group member and to gain entry to settings where other conventional approaches might be less successful (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

a) Advantages and disadvantages of snowball sampling

Van Meter (1990), Griffiths et al. (1993) and Kaplan et al. (1987) discuss the advantages and disadvantages of snowball sampling. These include:

Advantages

- Snowball sampling enables one to access a hidden, hard-to-reach or deviant population. The members of these populations are either vulnerable or involved in things seen as taboo, and/or stigmatised, which makes them reluctant to be involved in more formal studies that use traditional methods. Bullying is a topic not easily addressed or discussed, especially in the work environment, as people are fearful of being stigmatised or further bullied. What makes it more difficult is the fact that there is no clear definition of bullying. Companies in South Africa do not have any anti-bullying policies in place to protect employees, and survivors of bulling are vulnerable. They do not want to be seen and do not want anyone to find out when they share their stories. In this study, I therefore used discrete locations and made use of interview schedules, not surveys or group discussions.

- Trust needs to be established, which becomes easier when the referral is made via an acquaintance, or someone known to the participant. In this case, participant one introduced participant three. They were in the same field and are currently employed at the same company.

- This method of sampling is said to be economical, efficient and effective. It produces in-depth results relatively quickly. In this study, all that was required was the interview

schedule, which guided my interviews with participants and allowed them to give their own detailed accounts of what happened.

- The method may be used to examine changes over time.

- Being an ascending methodology, snowball sampling attains more comprehensive data, thus yielding knowledge on a variety of societal topics. Descending strategy is used more in quantitative research which does not require responses from particular groups.

b) Disadvantages of snowball sampling

- With snowball sampling, there may be problems of representativeness. The validity of the sample is limited owing to selection bias (Van Meter, 1990; Kaplan et al, 1987). Participants are not randomly drawn but are subjectively chosen by the respondents and this makes it difficult for the researcher to obtain a broad view from the sample (Griffiths et al., 1993).

Bias may creep into the sample, because of how participants are related to one another, which is a function of the cohesiveness in social networks (Griffiths et al., 1993). The method tends to omit those not connected to the network that the researcher has tapped into (Van Meter, 1990).

Large sample sizes can reduce this bias. In this study, recruiting participants was a challenge because after the first referral by participant one to participant three, I found that people did not want to take part in the study or did not respond to my request. When I attempted to contact them to set up dates for the interviews, there was often no reply, and I did not continue to press the matter since participation has to be voluntary. I respected that some people may not have wanted to participate in the research project. This made recruiting a tiring and time-consuming process. I had to look at recruiting participants outside of the sample population among women who did not know the first two participants at all. I also had to ask people I know whether they knew of women who had experienced or been exposed to bullying behaviour.

- Finding respondents and initiating the prescribed 'chain referral' was a laborious and time-consuming process. This was because it is more particularly challenging to identify members of a hidden population or those who have experienced an 'invisible' phenomenon such as workplace bullying. The process is easier when insider knowledge is obtained to attain the first respondent. My employment in the EAP environment, in

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which corporate bullying is sometimes reported to me as the social worker, made it relatively easy to access my initial respondent for this study. However, I was prevented from recruiting at the organisation at which I was employed at the time. Participant one was a colleague who wanted to share her experience and was currently being exposed to bullying behaviour.

The criteria for inclusion in the sample depended on the research question and on the personal views of the first participant, and how she experienced the phenomenon, along with that of the next person's experiences. This refers to the homogeneous social traits of the participants. Participant one responded well to the research questions. She was able to share her lived experience of corporate bullying and gave an honest and detailed account of her feelings and thoughts. Although participants two and participants four to seven were not referrals from participant one, they all portrayed similarities in their experience of the phenomenon.

- When engaging respondents as informal research assistants, it is vital to build and maintain the trust of the respondents to avoid antagonism and mistrust. In snowball sampling it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the respondents understand the purpose of the study, the consequences (if any) of participation, and that confidentiality is guaranteed. As researcher, I designed an information sheet along with a confidentiality form which was explained to and signed by the participants. The information was kept in a locked cabinet in a neutral office space. As researcher I had to be aware of any research fatigue, as participants from marginalised groups may have been involved in earlier research (Moore, 1996). I ensured that all participants knew that their information would remain confidential. Counselling was offered to all participants in the event that they should need it.

In contrast to purposive sampling (Creswell, 2007), I did not identify and select the prime participants. Participant one was the only one I was able to identify myself. The rest had to be recruited.

If I were to repeat this study, I would select both men and women and would confine myself to participants from one organisation. I might also recruit members by sending out a survey, which might yield a better response. However, the nature of the topic was sensitive and needed careful consideration.

- As is clear from the above description, the sample I used evolved and was shaped largely by the willingness of women to share their experiences.

The IPA normally uses small sample groups (Smith et al., 2009; Thompson et al., in Larkin and Thompson, 2011). Smith and Osborn, (2007) argue that the sample size for an IPA study is usually small. According to these authors, there is no specific sample size; the size depends on the degree of commitment, level of analysis and reporting, the richness of individual cases, and the constraints under which the researcher operates. Small groups allow for in-depth involvement with each case leading to a detailed investigation of merging and diverging themes.

As mentioned above, the use of snowball sampling was challenging and time consuming because the participants were not able to refer me to other participants. The intention was to recruit ten participants but in the end seven participants formed the sample

4.5.2 Participants in the study

Participants one to seven (all female) shared their personal experience of corporate bullying. Apart from participant one, participants could not refer me to other possible volunteers for the study. Participants one and three had witnessed corporate bullying in their current employment, but this detail was not included in the final data. All the participants were able to share their own personal experiences of corporate bullying in their various occupations and settings, which was included in the final data.

The first participant was an ex-colleague who had heard about my research and wanted to tell her story. She identified another individual but that interview never transpired. No reason was given for the lack of response. Participant two was an ex-social work colleague, while participants five, six and seven were referred by people I know who knew their stories.

Table 4.1 below shows the profile of the participants involved in this study. I share their qualifications and identify when in their lives and career each of these participants experienced corporate bullying. I discuss the impact of time and its relevance to the key themes mentioned in Chapter Three.

Table 4.1: Demographic profile of participants

NO	AGE	OCCUPATION	LANGUAGE	BULLYING INCIDENT
1	57	Nurse	English	Five years ago. Bullied by male head of department. No longer employed there.
2	42	Social worker	Xhosa/English	13 years ago (start of SW career) Bullied by female colleague. No longer employed there
3	44	Nurse	Afrikaans	Five years ago. Bullied by female manager. No longer employed there, but also experienced bullying in current employment.
4	36	Administrator	English	One year ago. Bullied by subordinate. Same employer.
5	42	Academic Administrator	English/Afrikaans	Two years ago. Bullied by female HOD. Same employer, different HOD.
6	27	Social worker	English/Afrikaans	Two years ago. Bullied by colleagues. Same employer.
7	30	HR	English	Bullied by colleague. No longer employed there.

The information in this table shows a total of seven women aged of 30 to 60 who willingly took part in the study. All were female.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION

Smith et al. (2009) stated that verbatim transcriptions of first-person accounts are required for the IPA, based on in-depth, one-to-one interviews. These allow the participants to think, speak and be heard and for in-depth and personal discussions to take place (Reid, Flowers & Markin, 2005). Other forms of data collection in the IPA include focus groups and written accounts, but these were not used in the current research project. As a qualitative phenomenology researcher, I allowed the participants to tell their stories of corporate bullying in their own words, using in-depth interviews. Data that was collected revealed the detailed and insightful reflections and meaning making of the participants (Larkin & Thompson, 2011).

4.6.1 The data collection instrument

Larkin and Osborn (2011) stated that interviews allow the researcher and the participants to engage in a dialogue during which questions are adapted according to the responses received

from the participants. Hence, a researcher is able to probe interesting and important responses which may arise. In-depth interviews were used for data collection, as this is the most natural form of interacting with people and a good way for the researcher to get to know a person and understand how they think and feel (Terre' Blanche et al., 2006). Interviews were planned to last one hour, but varied from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. I needed to listen attentively to the descriptions of the participants and how they regarded the phenomenon, noting their non-verbal or subtle cues.

To understand their lived experiences and obtain in-depth details, I started with the most important, central question, which was: 'Tell me about your experiences of being bullied in the workplace.' I used the term workplace bullying rather than corporate bullying. I also asked the following probing questions where needed:

- Where and when did this happen?
- How did you interpret what was happening? Who was the perpetrator?
- What were your thoughts about the context/events?
- Did you have expectations about what was to happen? Did you seek help? Where? If not, what prevented you?
- What were your first reaction/subsequent reactions?
- How did you come to a decision to act or do something about your concerns?
- What were the employer's concerns?
- Was the bullying/perpetrator addressed?
- If any, what were the implications for you as a person and how did you manage them?

These questions were used as a guide to gain additional information or to clarify what participants said. Seidman (2006) identified three stages of interviewing when using the qualitative phenomenological approach: First, establish context, where the participant will explain something about him/herself in respect to the topic; then construct the experience by asking participants to provide more details of the incident/event; lastly, reflect on the meaning by asking participants to make sense of the phenomenon.

It was important to gather as much information as possible from the seven female participants and to allow them to provide details of their experiences. Phenomenology assumes that participants have experienced a phenomenon first-hand. In the case of the first-person approach (FPA), researchers use their own subjective experiences and descriptive or hermeneutic

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methods to examine the quality and essence of a phenomenon. This approach is inspired by the ideals of Husserl, who advocated that access to the world is through consciousness as experienced from the first-person perspective (Tuffour, 2017). This FPA involves concrete narrative descriptions of momentous events interspersed with theoretical discussion and/or literary flourish, thus catapulting personal reflections into the realm of a detailed and deep analysis of experiences (Tuffour, 2017).

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all interviews were conducted in spaces where participants felt secure and safe to share openly. Some of these locations were libraries, on-site/off-site offices or coffee shops. The interviews were conducted close to the participants' workplaces, since all took place during the week, during working hours or during lunch breaks. This created time constraints, as some needed to get back to work. There was not always enough time to expand on what they were saying. On the other hand, participant seven allowed me to conduct the interview in her own home, which facilitated a particularly satisfying interview in which she was able to speak freely and at length.

All interviews were audio recorded with the participants' permission. Participants three and four were limited with regard to time as we conducted the interviews during their lunch breaks. Despite this, all participants gave their full attention and detailed information. All interviews were conducted in a non-threatening manner, which allowed the participants to share comfortably.
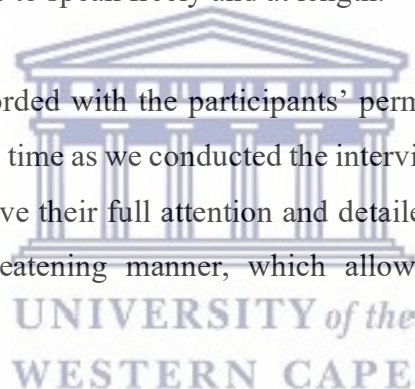
4.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The phenomenological IPA was selected to analyse the data. The IPA aims to ascertain the personal meanings that people assign to certain events or phenomena as they reconstruct events through telling their stories (Tsarsata & Johnson, 2002).

Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) clearly describe the process of coding and data analysis in the IPA, where the researcher moves from descriptive to interpretive questions in order to understand both the events and participants' meaning making of the events (Smith et al., 2010). Smith (2007) describes this analytical process as 'iterative' and 'inductive' and highlights the following seven strategies: Line-by-line analysis, highlighting the claims and understandings of the participant; identifying themes; creating a dialogue with the data; coding and interpreting

the data; illustrating the relationship between themes; and organising data and checking for plausibility to explain and interpret the data. All of this is done while reflecting on an individual's own perceptions and biases. An analysis of each individual's transcript aims to yield a detailed account of the participant's observations and understanding, rather than a set of general claims.

Because I was concerned with the lived experiences of the participants, I followed thematic analysis as a method of analysing and interpreting the data. King and Horrocks (2010) identified several steps in the process of organising data into themes. They define 'themes' as patterns of interest. Braun and Clark (2006) concur with this and further argue that the researcher decides what to include and to exclude, as well as identifying repetitions. Thus, themes are 'recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question' (King & Horrocks, 2010:150). Another important step in analysis is checking data within and across cases. Not only did I look for patterns in the individual cases, but also at all the data collectively to identify similarities and differences. This process was followed by deciding on themes and sub-themes, and placing units of data into the themes and sub-themes to which they seemed to belong. This process is described by Braun and Clark (2006). The organisation of themes may also include links between hierarchical groups or clusters and it is therefore vital to ensure balance and clarity while giving as much information as possible, using a diagram or mind-map if necessary (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Drawing on the principles of thematic analysis by Langdridge (2004) and Braun and Clark (2006), the following three stages were implemented:

Stage 1: Descriptive coding
Transcription is one of the first steps in Stage 1. King and Horrocks (2010) describe the process of transcription as 'converting recorded material into text'. This was my first step in the data analysis process, where I transcribed all seven interviews that were conducted. This allowed to me to become more familiar with the data (Langdridge, 2004). Transcribing was based on interviews recorded on my cellular phone and transferred to my laptop.

After transferring the audio recordings onto my laptop and systemising and labelling them in chronological order (dates, time, duration and venues), I listened to the recordings for the first

time and continued doing this several times while comparing the recordings with transcripts and notes taken.

I then read and re-read the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings, which allowed me to immerse myself in the original data set. This was done to ensure that the participants were the focus of my analysis (Smith, 2016), with the help of field observation notes and reflective memos. I became actively engaged with the data, systemising it by numbering each line and page of all the transcripts which made it easier to identify important information. I then used a pencil to highlight important issues, as prescribed for descriptive coding. Smith et al. (2009) followed a similar process and defined it as reading and re-reading and initial noting, which includes descriptive comments (key events and experiences), linguistic comments (language) and conceptual comments (using additional knowledge to interpret what is being said). Figure 4.1 presents a photograph of a transcript of a participant interview, showing Stage 2 in the data analysis process.

Figure 4.1: Interview transcription
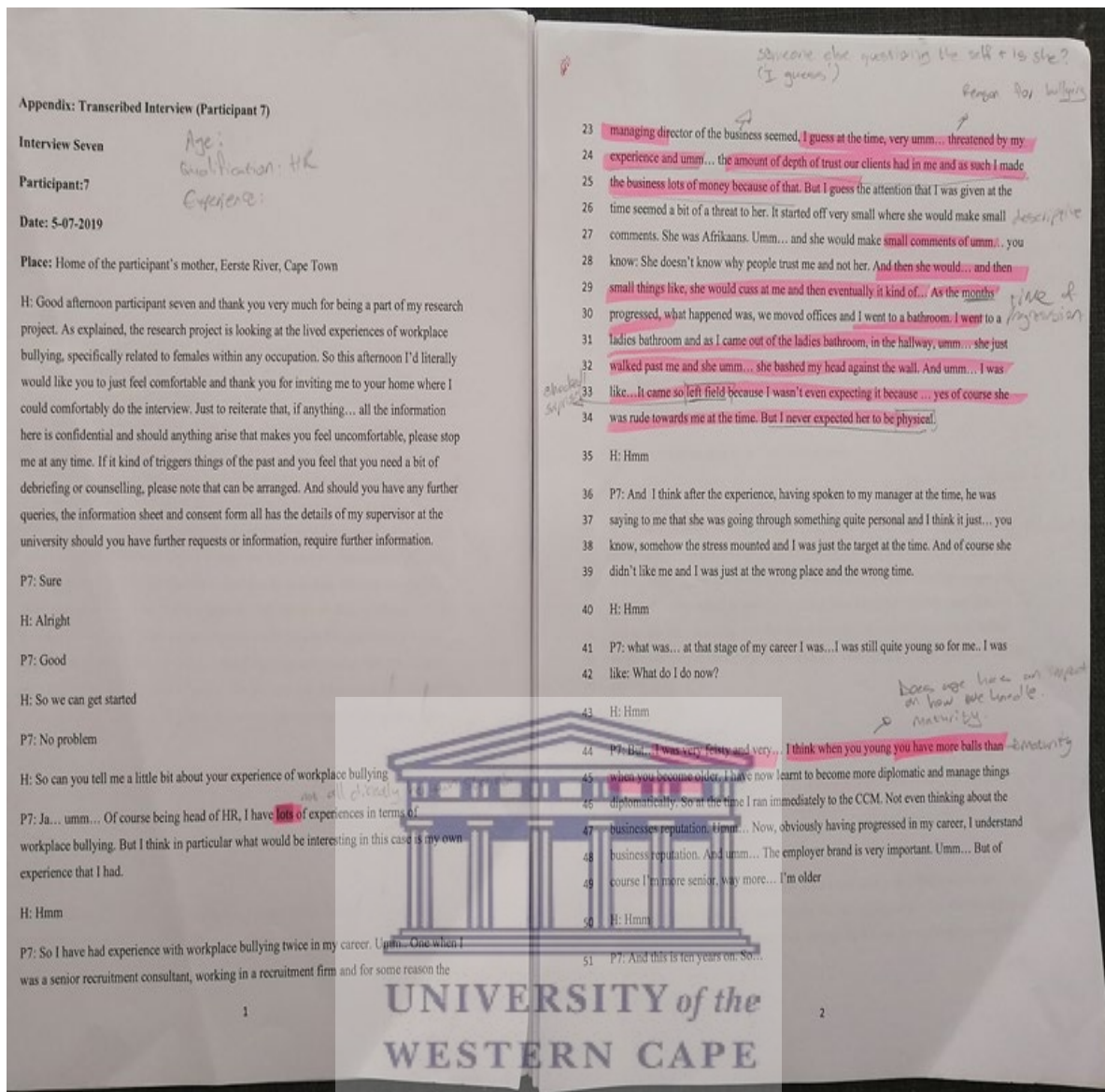
Stage 2: Interpretive coding

During this stage I went beyond descriptive coding and moved back and forth between the transcripts to do interpretive coding, focusing particularly on the participants' words and meanings (Smith et al., 2009). By continuously going back to the transcripts I was able to de-contextualise the information and gain an in-depth understanding of what the participant was saying.

Stage 3: Defining overarching themes

Figure 4.2 below shows the coding process I engaged in during the study in order to identify themes.

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Figure 4.2: Overarching themes that emerged
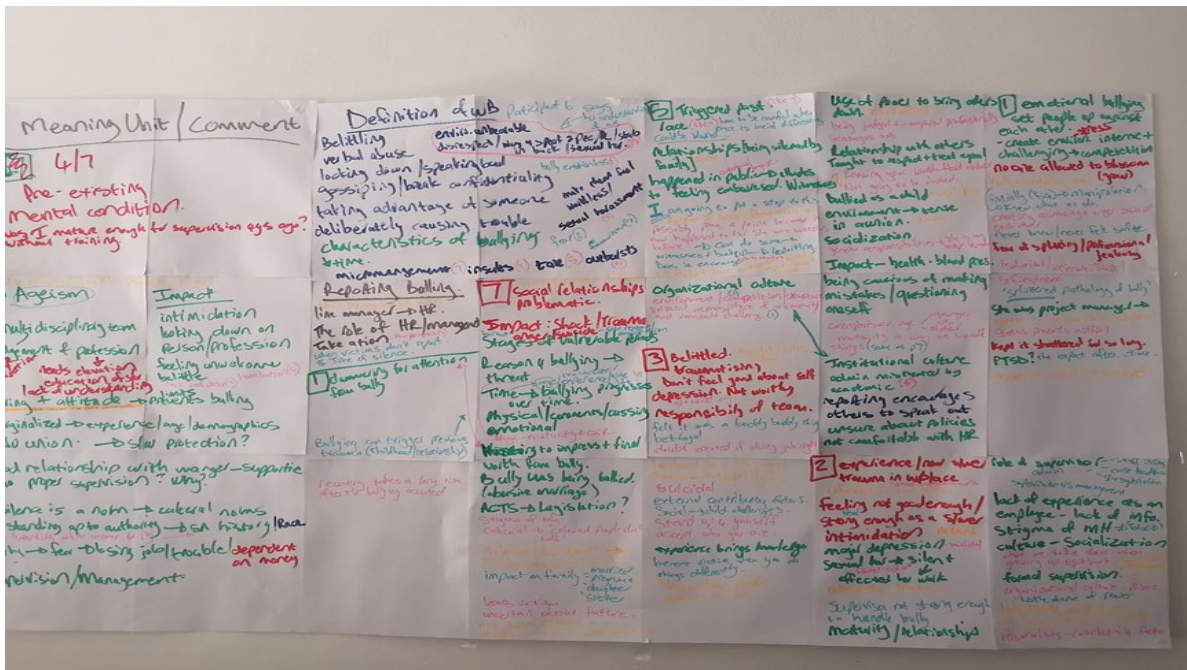
During this phase, qualitative data, *patterns* and *themes* were identified deductively, interpreted at the covert level, and described, using King and Horrocks's (2010) thematic analysis approach. Identifying themes involved selecting words and quotes that were relevant, discarding some, and deciding how the participants' words could be interpreted to create meaning. A 'theme' here refers to something mentioned more than once and distinct from other themes. A theme is therefore made up of 're-current and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question' (King & Horrocks, 2010:149).

The themes were coded and re-coded and confirmed with guidance from my supervisors.

Two parts of the analysis process are described by Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005). They explain that data analysis steps within the IPA involve an 'inductive' and 'interactive' process that assists the researcher to gain 'insider perspective' about the phenomenon. This is further identified as the 'emic' and 'etic' positions in IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

The 'emic' refers to the 'phenomenological insider position'. The researcher listens to the participants' stories, highlighting the core values of their perceptions in relation to their world view. In addition, in this case, my own experiences of workplace bullying would be relevant.

The 'etic' refers to the 'interpretative outsider position', where the researcher attempts to make sense of participant experiences, perceptions and apprehensions using a theoretical framework. In this case I used the framework of Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) to assist in answering questions on the lived experiences of women regarding corporate bullying.

A detailed and labour-intensive method of coding was undertaken to organise and interpret the data, which helped to reveal the themes and sub-themes hidden in the data. Coding is described as a line-by-line analysis of the participants' accounts of their experiences and explanations (Alase, 2017: 14). In transcribing the data, I spotted commonalities and differences in verbatim accounts, which helped to formulate the themes. In order to interpret and understand the lived experiences of all seven participants, and to add rigour, I read and re-read the transcripts and coded information in each transcript in a comparative manner. Following this I was able to see and study the relationship between certain themes.

As the IPA is interpretative, I needed to test the coherence and plausibility of the research (Markin & Thompson, 2011). Therefore, I embarked on a vigorous process of ensuring trustworthiness, as discussed below.

4.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE DATA

Babbie and Mouton (2014) emphasise the importance of trustworthiness in qualitative research, which is established through the application of various measures to ensure the integrity, veracity and competence of the study. Alase (2016) states that IPA research studies must contain the elements of trustworthiness, member-checking, triangulation and auditing in order to ensure trustworthiness. Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which research findings are perceived as accurate by the researcher, the participants, and readers of an account (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Furthermore, it is the extent to which expressions of studied phenomena substantially represent all their multiple, complementary, and even contradictory facets (Hammersley, 1990:33). Shenton and Andrew (2004) identified the criteria for trustworthiness as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

4.8.1 Credibility
Lincoln and Guba (2000) refer to credibility as the congruence between participants' perceptions of the setting and events and those of the researcher. Babbie and Mouton (2011)

further explain that credibility involves each participant's transcript being reviewed to identify similarities across transcripts. In this study, credibility was ensured through a continuous commitment to getting the sample population to answer the research questions. It was strengthened by using the transcripts of the participants as the basis for all analysis, so that findings, conclusions, and recommendations are all based on participants' words. Furthermore, my supervisor read the transcripts to confirm that what was transcribed accurately reflected what was said and included observations of verbal and non-verbal communication. I continued member checking to clarify content of what the participant had said. I kept memos and included my reflexivity notes to ensure that I did not allow my own thoughts and feelings to influence the validity of the data.

4.8.2 Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (2000) describe transferability as the degree of similarity between the research site and other sites, as judged by the reader on the basis of a thick description provided by the researcher. Transferability requires that the data has depth and richness, and that it describes the context in sufficient detail. This study aimed to explore and describe the lived experiences of women regarding the phenomenon under investigation, using snowball sampling to obtain detailed accounts of the phenomenon. These details allow other researchers to evaluate whether, using similar designs or contexts, they may expect to obtain similar results.

4.8.3 Dependability

For a study to be dependable, readers must be provided with a detailed summary of the assumptions and theory informing the study (De Vos et al., 2005), and all aspects of the study – conceptualisation, data collection, data analysis, findings and conclusions – must be thoroughly explained. Babbie and Mouton (2014) concur with this idea, stating that the dependability of a study depends on whether the findings, interpretation and recommendations are supported by the data as received from participants of the study. In this study, dependability was ensured by obtaining detailed data from seven women, all of whom had been exposed to or experienced the phenomenon. This study clearly identifies and explains the theory and how it has been applied.

4.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability involves authentication of the findings and the degree to which the findings of the study might be confirmed by other researchers (Babbie & Mouton, 2014). Participants were

informed that this was a voluntary process. The space in which interviews took place was safe, the information remained confidential, and the process was non-judgemental. Thus, confirmability was attained through guidance from my supervisor and by establishing a clear link between the findings and interpretations. Confirmability was also ensured through using audio recording of interviews, transcripts, researcher memos and the researcher's reflexivity (De Vos et al., 2005).

4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical conduct in research, as defined by Babbie and Mouton (2011), means adhering to a code of good conduct. Ethics clearance was obtained from the Humanities and Social Science Research Committee of the University of the Western Cape. Further to this, I am a registered social worker guided by the South African Council of Social Service Professionals (SACSSP) and their Code of Ethics. As a researcher, I maintained these throughout the research project, as well as by ensuring the following:

4.9.1 Voluntary participation

Each participant was informed of the nature of the study, verbally and in writing. They received a consent form to sign, as well as an information sheet about the study, printed in the language of their choice. I then scheduled individual interviews with each participant. Participants were all made aware that participation in the research process was voluntary (see information sheet and consent forms in the Appendices). Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence to themselves. Fortunately, none of the participants withdrew from the study.

4.9.2 Informed consent

Participants were made aware of the purpose and nature of the study, and that participation was voluntary. They were told that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point, and that a counsellor would be made available should they feel the need for debriefing or further counselling. An information letter was provided to each participant during recruitment. They were encouraged to scrutinise the information letter and to ask any questions should they need clarity on any aspect of the study. The information letter included the contact details of the main supervisor and the Head of the Social Work Department at UWC, as well as the details of the Dean of the Community and Health Sciences faculty at UWC. The information letter

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included the ethics code of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Committee as proof that the research was ethically sound and had been approved by the committee. Once participants were satisfied with the information regarding the study, they were given a consent form to complete and sign, indicating their voluntary participation in the study, and that they agreed to be audio recorded during interviews. All participants signed the consent form, after all their questions about the study had been answered.

4.9.3 Confidentiality

Given the sensitivity of the topic, confidentiality was a crucial aspect of the ethics observed in this study. The identity of the participants needed to be protected, so their real names were not used at any point during the research or in the final research report. (See attached forms in the appendices for a guarantee of confidentiality made to the participants.) During the first contact with each participant, I explained the purpose of the research project, the possible effects of participation, and efforts that would be made to ensure their safety and the confidentiality of their personal information, which I undertook not to disclose to anyone besides the research supervisor. All concerns and questions were addressed in this session. Support services were made available to all participants, but no one made use of the service. All information related to this study was kept in a locked cupboard to which only I had access, although information was shared with the supervisor when necessary. Appointment dates were also kept confidential.

4.10 REFLEXIVITY

King and Horrocks (2010:126) argue that many different meanings are attached to the term 'reflexivity' in qualitative research. At its most general level, reflexivity refers to an acknowledgment of the fact that researchers and the methodology they use are embedded in the politics and practices of the social world. From a social work perspective, this acknowledgment assumes that research conducted on social work practice involves an interactive process 'in and by individual subjects with emotions and theoretical and political commitments' (King & Horrocks, 2010:126). The role that the researcher plays in shaping the outcomes of the research is important and has to be acknowledged and managed.

In this study I conducted in-depth interviews as part of the data collection process. The interviews were recorded and transcribed electronically. The analysis and interpretation of the

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data form part of this report. As the researcher, I would like to explain my role and provide clarity on the context in which this research was conducted.

The phenomenon under investigation is a sensitive matter and I needed to be aware not to be emotionally involved, especially in light of the fact I had been subjected to the experience under review. I am a professional social worker, who recently practised as a clinical social worker. My past practice involved exposure to mental health cases, child protection, statutory work, family care and community engagement. During my most recent employment, at the time of conceptualising the study, I was working as a clinical social worker in the private corporate sector in EAP as an employee wellness coordinator. Here I offered training, counselling and support services to nursing staff and other professionals in their field. At times I was involved with mediation and advocating for the rights of those exposed to circumstances which left them feeling excluded and inferior. In this environment it was predominantly women who were plagued by the phenomenon of workplace bullying.

At the time that I experienced the perceived bullying, I was a relatively new social worker receiving supervision from a social worker who was responsible for seven to eight fieldworkers. We received formal supervision and had regular case discussions and the supervisor was always aware of each of the cases. There was strong team cohesion and a general open-door policy.

I was aged between 30 and 35 and newly married when I began working for the company. I was the only social worker of colour in a team of eight responsible for offering EAP services to various other companies nationwide. The company is privately owned by a white married couple (female and male, wife and husband). The staff complement was dominated by females. I was part of a multi-disciplinary team in an occupational health setting, along with nursing staff and occupational medical doctors. My supervisor was the owner of the company and a qualified nurse. This brought its own challenges. After two years of being in the team I applied for and was given a supervisor/coordinator post. After working in this position for four years I noticed behaviours that suggested racial discrimination and ageism and began to feel marginalised because of my profession as a social worker. This greatly impacted my functioning in the workplace. Similar impressions were being reported by the clients I was working with and by co-workers, who suffered from stress, depression and anxiety owing to what they described as workplace 'bullying'. I saw the impact that the situation had on my

colleagues. I realised that my wellbeing was being affected as well as my relationships (professional and personal), and it caused a sense of disconnection from others. I realised then, that it is often the victim who deals and lives with the consequences and the bullies are seldom taken to task.

During my employment at this organisation, I found that I was continually in a battle to receive acknowledgement as a professional person, in view of my age, as I was considerably younger than my boss. The treatment that I and colleagues received motivated me to challenge certain policies and practices within and outside the organisation. The situation raised my awareness of and concern for the type of corporate organisational culture I was a part of, and the structural discrepancies which keep so many workers in bondage.

I felt emancipated when I left this employment position to start my own private practice as a social worker. In hindsight, I realised the importance of mentoring and coaching to grow and cultivate a solid leadership orientation when one initiates a new venture of this sort. In working for myself, my self-discovery, growth and introspection on the roles and functioning of social workers in the supervision and management processes were taken to new heights. I learned that with the necessary strengths-based approach (Engelbrecht, 2016) and with proper supervision, training, mentorship and coaching for leadership (all of which are professional requirements – see SACCSP and CPD), I could have survived in the workplace. I might not have been left to flounder, seeing only my weaknesses, and I might have been quite ready to lead a professional team or take on the role of supervisor. At the time, no supervision and or management skills training as specified by the SACSSP were offered, and it was not deemed a pre-requisite for the position by the organisation. After many requests and debates, my request was eventually granted, but not officially supported as a principle for growing staff. The granting of permission and the stretching of organisational boundaries to allow for my supervision training was hard won, and in the end had negative effects on my relationship with the team. One member specifically felt I was not equipped to supervise her, which resulted in verbal outbursts in the presence of the team and in one-on-one sessions between myself and the supervisee. The resistance to cooperating in a professional supervision process escalated to a point where I needed external debriefing sessions. I also advocated for referral services to deal with burn-out syndrome at the organisation's expense.

Because the owner of the company was also the manager, and accused of bullying, reporting bullying was not possible, as there was no other internal structure of communication to facilitate an investigation or to access support services. The HR team also reported bullying behaviour from the manager and were of little help to me.

All of this is related to indicate that my own experience of being bullied while in a management role in an organisation informed this study, without overly shaping it. My experience gave me a deep insight regarding the need for respect and understanding of the other person's dignity in professional relationships.

This research project was thus prompted my own experiences, which opened my eyes to the need for investigation into the complex and at times subtle and hidden phenomenon of workplace bullying. I was interested in the experiences of other women who had been exposed to or witnessed corporate bullying, and what the impact of their experiences were on themselves and others. My investigation revealed the implications of a lack of specific bullying policies in workplaces in the Western Cape and in South Africa.

Throughout the research I attempted to remain professional, and handled each participant with empathy, confidentiality, and honesty, as each individual had her own narrative of her experiences of the phenomenon. I took precautions to remain neutral and not to let my own experiences colour how I interpreted their experiences. To ensure this, I attended sessions with a psychologist to deal with any possible issues that may have risen. I kept a journal to help me become aware of my own thoughts and feelings that might otherwise have influenced the research process, and I attended regular sessions with my supervisor.

I practised bracketing, in which I identified and put aside my own thoughts, feelings and experiences so as not to allow them to influence the information shared by participants.

4.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the methodology used in this study in detail. I have explained the nature of qualitative phenomenological research, which was used to describe and understand the lived experiences of corporate bullying as experienced by women from a South African social work perspective. Feminist phenomenology was the best framework with which to view

the phenomenon, as it allowed an understanding of the rich data obtained through in-depth interviews and the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach. Bracketing and reflexivity were important to the research process and in analysis of the data because they prevented me from influencing the data and allowed for a true reflection of the participants' experiences.

The following chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research findings on the experiences and effects of workplace bullying on the participants in this study, as reconstructed from their narratives. The data was analysed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA), as described in Chapter Four. This chapter describes what the participants experienced (in the form of textual descriptions) and how the events happened (in the form of structural descriptions) as related by the seven participants during in-depth interviews. Transcribing and data coding was conducted as part of the content analysis phase, in which themes and sub-themes were identified. Themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 5.1. As previously discussed, Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) was adopted as a feminist theoretical framework to assist with filtering and reconstructing the stories of the seven women who experienced workplace bullying.

The main research question, as previously mentioned, was directed to the issue of lived experiences of workplace bullying as perceived by employees in a South African employment and labour rights-based context. The three key sub-questions addressed in the interviews were:

1. Tell me about your experiences of being bullied in the workplace. Prompts: Where and when did this happen? How did you interpret what was happening? Who was the perpetrator?
2. What were your thoughts about the context/events? Prompts: Did you have expectations about what was to happen? Did you seek help? Where did you seek help? If not, what prevented you from seeking help?
3. What were your first reactions/subsequent reactions to the experience of being bullied in the workplace? Prompts: How did you come to a decision to act or do something about your concerns? What were the employer's concerns? Was the bullying and/or the perpetrator addressed/confronted?

Further probing and clarity were sought throughout the interviewing process in an attempt to gain depth and insight and gather as much relevant information as possible to achieve the main goal of the study, which was to understand the lived experiences of the employees with regard to workplace bullying and the influence it had on the individuals and their families.

This chapter is structured as follows: First a presentation of the themes and sub-themes is presented in Table 5.1, followed by a discussion of the findings in light of the theory and the findings of other researchers.

5.2 KEY THEMES THAT EMERGED

Seven female participants shared their accounts of their experiences of workplace bullying (WPB), how it affected them and the influence it had on their families.

In the formulation of themes, I identified the meaning unit described by Graneheim and Lundman (2004) as words or phrases relating to the same theme or central meaning.

Table 5.1 below indicates the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the individual interviews with participants.

Table 5.1: Themes and sub-themes related to participants' experiences of WPB

Theme 1 Participants' perceptions and experiences of WPB	**Theme 2** The effects of WPB on participants' relationships	**Theme 3** Employee support and assistance for persons who experienced WPB	**Theme 4** The effects of WPB on participants' physical and mental health
Sub-themes	**Sub-themes**	**Sub-themes**	**Sub-themes**
Participants' perceptions of the workplace bully	The effects of WPB on participants' relationships with colleagues	The supportive role of supervisors in the workplace	Physical health challenges exacerbated by WPB
Participants' perceptions of power dynamics relating to bullying in the workplace	The effects of WPB on participants' intimate partner relationships	Taking action and reporting WPB	The effects of WPB on participants' mental health
Different forms of bullying in the workplace		Participants' perceptions of Human Resource personnel's handling of WPB	Suicidal thoughts as a consequence of WPB

5.3 DISCUSSION OF THE THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Four key themes and several sub-themes were identified, as can be seen in Table 5.1. The themes were identified through a rigorous and lengthy application of the IPA, as discussed in Chapters Three and Four. Below, the themes are presented and substantiated with relevant references to the literature on corporate bullying and RCT.

5.3.1 Theme 1: Participants' perceptions and experiences of workplace bullying (WPB)

Bullying in the workplace is not always easy to prove as the workplace bully often manipulates and is usually in a position of power over the target. In addition, the bullying seldom occurs in public view (León-Pérez, 2021). Therefore, targets of WPB are sometimes unsure whether the behaviour that they have been subjected to constitutes workplace bullying (Feijó, Gräf, Pearce, et al., 2019).

Several participants gave accounts of and/or perceptions of what they described as WPB and of what a bully is. Their perceptions and experiences of WPB included how they perceived the person who bullied them, the power dynamic involved, and the different forms of bullying that they had experienced in the workplace. Three sub-themes emerged from this theme and are discussed next.

5.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Participants' perceptions of the perceived workplace bully

In Chapter One, I referred to assertions by Smith (2014), who cited Namie and Namie (2004:316) in relation to the four types of bullies:

- The 'screaming Mimi' is the bully who toxifies the workplace with mood swings and threats.
- The 'constant critic' is the bully who is obsessed with the performance of others and constantly criticises their work.
- The 'two-headed snake' is the bully who climbs the corporate ladder by spreading rumours, aiming to divide and conquer.
- the 'gatekeeper' is the bully who is fixated on control and power and guarantees the failure of the target.

It was clear from the experiences of the participants that bullying occurs on various levels; top-down, where the bully is someone in a position of authority; bottom-up, where the bully is a subordinate; and horizontal, where the bully is a colleague. Participants described the

characteristics of the person that they perceived as a workplace bully, describing them as emotionally fragile people whose and attitudes and behaviours were inconsistent.

> *He* [referring to the perceived workplace bully] *would be very ... gentle and kind the one minute if he thought you were complying ... but as soon as you spoke out ... that was a huge problem* [for him] (Participant 1).

> *I don't think he sees the emotional side to his world, his work and his personality. I know that hurt people hurt, so he doesn't see the hurt that he's* doing [referring to WPB]*, because he is still hurt* (Participant 4).

> *I felt that this is a very insecure, self-centred, spoilt individual and in order to make herself feel better she uses power to bring down people, in order to make herself feel better* (Participant 5).
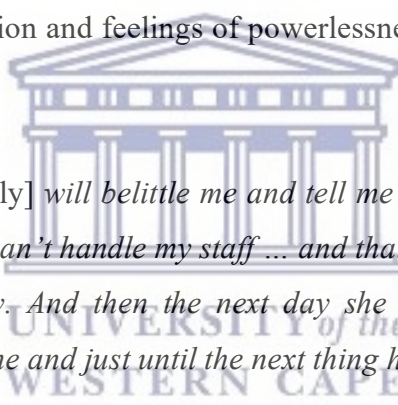
Participants' collective descriptions of behaviours attached to perceived bullying appeared similar. According to Reknes, Einarsen, Pallesen, et al. (2016) and Verkuil et al. (2010), bullying is associated with prolonged exposure to conditions of emotional and social stress and a feeling of loss of control and inability to cope, which in turn increases the risk of developing mental health challenges. A study on the role of the perpetrator of WPB and the onset of depressive symptoms by Lange, Burr, Rose and Conway (2020) suggests that the type of perpetrator is an important factor to consider when bullying is perpetrated by co-workers. These authors state that bullying is displayed in various forms, including as physical, mental, emotional and verbal abuse. The experiences of the participants in my study concur with the findings of these authors, who refer to irrational, unacceptable, disrespectful, offensive, humiliating and intimidating actions toward the target. The bullying seemed to result in prolonged exposure to emotional and social stress, a feeling of loss of control and the inability to cope, which has been found to increase the risk of mental health challenges. Previous reporting by Cilliers, although outdated, is still relevant to this study, as he refers to the perceived bully having a tendency of 'acting out' in front of others, shouting, using foul language and distracting the target from their work, with the intension of making the target feel powerless, ridiculed and incompetent, and struggling with self-esteem and self-confidence (Cilliers, 2012:2).

Although there were differences in setting, timeline, occupation and other aspects, I was able to identify differences and similarities in participants' perceptions of the perceived workplace bully.

Linking their descriptions to RCT, it is clear that, as the theory states, the participants wanted good relationships in their lives (Jordan, 2017). If a relationship such as a collegial relationship does not enhance a sense of positive worth and instead causes a sense of disconnect, the person on the receiving end of such a disconnect may lose their zest and their sense of self-worth may decrease. This is what happened for most participants in this study; the perceived workplace bully was seen as someone who was not mindful of others and their feelings and treated the target in an unfair and unkind manner.

5.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Participants' perceptions of power dynamics relating to workplace bullying

Several participants reflected on the power dynamics that intersected with the issue of hierarchical positions in the workplace. They described the power dynamic as one in which they were subjected to humiliation and feelings of powerlessness. The following are some of their narratives:

Then she [the workplace bully] *will belittle me and tell me what a bad person I am and I can't do my job and I can't handle my staff ... and that quite made me feel very belittled and .... not worthy. And then the next day she will make as if nothing happened. She'll be nice to me and just until the next thing happened* (Participant 3).

He was honest to say to me that he ... looked down on our practice because he felt that everyone just goes to study social work for the DSD bursary. So that looking down, that you are a social worker and I'm a doctor ... um ... verbal abuse, looking down and speaking bad of certain professions or speaking bad about a certain individual at work [is perceived as WPB] (Participant 6).

Research on power dynamics in the workplace (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016; Limon, 2018; Coffell, 2017) correlates with the findings in this sub-theme. The division of professionals into clusters breeds power imbalances, which is often found in settings where social workers work in interprofessional teams with others (Limon, 2018; Coffell, 2017). Social workers are often prone to being negatively stereotyped (Beddoe, 2015;

Braithwaite et al., 2016; Hobbs & Evans, 2017). This indicates that there is a lack of understanding about the role of social workers in various fields, which decreases collegiality and respect and may lead to WPB (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016; Coffell, 2017; Green, 2017; Limon, 2018). Participants' narratives in the current study back up the findings in the literature that there is a clear correlation between WPB and power differentiation.

RCT helps the researcher to identify systems of oppression and how these systems in society may be improved to contribute to peaceful co-existence. The cultural component of RCT emphasises growth toward an amplified aptitude for respect, an awareness of the effect that people have on one another and an acceptance of being changed by the other. It states that people can acknowledge differences and power disparities while continuing toward mutual empowerment (Jordan, 2017) in order to create opportunities for conflict resolution and transformation. In this study, the participants' sense of worth was so adversely affected that it impacted on their growth. While some were able to stand up against the perceived workplace bully, others never had the courage, which decreased their morale and sense of self-worth.

5.3.1.3 Sub-themes 1.3: Participants' experiences of different forms of WPB

Dzurec et al. (2017) argue that WPB has enormous implications for organisations. South Africa, like the rest of the world, is in a time of economic crisis in which unemployment is high and employees are pressured to stay in the jobs they are in, regardless of working conditions. The decision of whether to stay in a toxic work environment or to leave is a dilemma that participants in this study had to face. Both staying and leaving have enormous consequences and will depend on the circumstances and the degree of bullying.

Participants' experiences of WPB included emotional manipulation, sexual assault, verbal and physical abuse. One participant reported that the bullying escalated to outside the workplace on social media platforms, which is a form of cyberbulling. These are some of their narratives:

It was more emotional bullying because he [the perceived workplace bully] *would, um, set people up. He would put – ja, set one person up against the other person. They* [colleagues in the workplace] *were forever competing at such a level, that it cost ... people to say that they can't do it anymore, whereas they were perfectly capable of doing it. The stress of the environment and the competition that he created was a form*

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of bullying, because nobody was allowed to have their ... to blossom in their own particular way ... He was going to create this animosity and constant challenge and this anger toward each other (Participant 1).

What contributed to me [being unhappy and victimised in the workplace]*, the major depression as well also, was um, sexual harassment, at that workplace, as well, that contributed. So, there was a lot of factors that led to that* [being diagnosed with depression]. *Because when I moved there, I was fine* (Participant 2).

She [the perceived workplace bully] *also started bashing me on social media and sending me, at least it was privately, on my instant messenger, in my inbox, like these long things* [hostile and destructive messages]. *And I'm just like ... can you just leave me alone? And she just doesn't stop* (Participant 4).

… and then small things like, she would cuss (use vulgar language*) at me and then eventually it kind of* [escalated]. *She bashed my head against the wall. Yes, of course she was rude towards me at the time but I never expected her to be physical.* (Participant 7).

From the above, it is clear that one participant experienced an incident of physical bullying which occurred after years of emotional bullying. It was clear from her evidence that the reported aggressive behaviour really took place. None of the other participants reported physical bullying. Their scars were emotional and psychological, which is often difficult to prove. It may be for this reason that it is easier for the effects of WPB to be identified as stress. The symptoms are the same and stress is something that is clearly defined and understood. Harassment and sexual harassment were also identified (Bacchi,1999; 2009; Smith, 2014, cited by Salin 2003:1219). These are specialised forms of bullying, with the two forms of WPB showing similarities owing to the organisational power dynamic, which in turn may be rooted in societal power differences (Lange et al., 2020).

It seems that creating a competitive environment is a common tactic of the workplace bully, which becomes a breeding ground for WPB. Participants described how they competed with others for advancement in their careers and for the approval of their managers. This created an

opportunity for those in power to manipulate people, with unreasonable deadlines or an increase in workloads. In such instances, this abuse of power may eventually become WPB.

Hershcovis and Barling, (2010) further argue that, while superiors have more formal power, co-workers have power to influence social relationships and provoke social exclusion. This type of bullying may involve more confrontation and less action than the bullying exhibited by a workplace superior.

Iftikhar, Waheed, Yousafzai and Qureshi (2020) examined the prevalence of in-person and cyberbullying in the workplace in the healthcare profession and its impact on job outcomes. They found that WPB negatively affects job outcomes as it increases job strain, job stress and psychological strain, and decreases job satisfaction. The findings by Iftikhar et al. (2020), as well as those of Lange et al (2020), Buonomo, Fiorilli, Romano and Benevene (2020), Balducci, Conway and Van Heugten (2021) and De Wet and Jacobs (2021), concur with the current study's findings relating to participants' experiences of different forms of WPB.

Cyberbullying was an aspect only mentioned by Participant 4, but I saw it as such an important aspect of bullying that it was worthy of inclusion and discussion. Cyberbullying is described by Ramdeo and Singh (2020) and Rosli, Ya'cob, Bakar and Bajury (2021), who define it as repeated intimidating behaviour by an individual or group using technology in the form of emails, faxes and text messages. Cyberbullying has the same characteristics as other forms of bullying in that there is a power struggle, and the harm is intentional. The only difference is that it takes place by means of electronic devices and is displayed on social media platforms (Iftikhar et al., 2020), where the bully does not have to face the victim eye to eye.

It can be concluded that WPB is a complex phenomenon and that different forms of bullying seem to be universal, irrespective of the context in which they occur.

Participants' sense of wellbeing was negatively affected. They were not able to cope with life stressors, their productivity deteriorated and there was disconnection, as described by Jordan (2017).

5.3.2 Theme 2: The effects of workplace bullying on participants' relationships

RCT places relationships at the forefront of human interaction, acknowledging that they are complex. As human beings, we grow through relationships. The complexity of human relationships is linked to connection and disconnection and the social implications of connection and disconnection. RCT emphasises the relational matrix which has broad integrative emphasis. Relationships include external and internalised patterns of relating in the sociocultural environment (Miller, 1976; Jordan, 2017). Disconnections are inevitable in some relationships and how we handle these events is important to our sense of wellbeing. In the case of corporate bullying, participants in this study felt disempowered, and their feelings about the experience were not validated. It would therefore seem that persons who experience WPB may not be able to bring themselves into the full experience of the relationship. They may change themselves to be accepted by the perceived workplace bully, and they may also withdraw, becoming more emotionally distant and anxious. The relationship becomes less authentic and less mutual. I therefore concur with Jordan (2017) that disconnections arising from conflicts where there is a power imbalance hurt people in families and communities. Participants described the effect that WPB had on their relationships with colleagues and intimate partners. Work relationships were characterised as distrustful and fraught with anxiety, with jealousy and fear affecting their daily lives. In terms of intimate partner relationships, participants all reported that their partners were supportive but also that partners were concerned about the negative effect of the WPB on their physical and mental health.

5.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: The effects of workplace bullying on participants' relationships with colleagues

WPB has distinct adverse effects on the person experiencing and/or perceiving WPB. Participants described how the perceived WPB negatively affected their relationships, not only with the perceived bully but with other colleagues and managers. Some reported that they withdrew, while others reported that they did not trust any of their colleagues. Some had the support of supervisors and managers. These are some of their experiences:

> *I was a project manager, so I didn't want to cause any more anxiety as it was, but I did feel that it had to be spoken about ... But it was very difficult to choose the people to speak to because it could be seen as splitting or professional jealousy. It could change into anything he* [the perceived workplace bully] *wanted.* [I was] *fearful that I was going to be the only one he didn't want part of his team. I actually called a*

meeting with him and, um, there was one other professional that I asked to be part of the meeting, just to facilitate. However, … there was going to be no outcome. So, what does this mean? [Referring to attempts to resolve the hostility]. *This means nothing. 'I am not going to change anything', he said.* (Participant 1).

It was the sexual harassment within the first week [in the organisation]. *I didn't know anybody. I didn't trust anybody, you know. And then I kept quiet about it also. That was when it started affecting my work* (Participant 2).

My manager was also a very soft-hearted person. So, she saw the good in everyone and she didn't see that in her [the perceived workplace bully]. *She obviously showed her good side when the manager was around. Um … and no one saw it* [the undertones of hostility and bullying]. *Everyone was completely blinded by her* (Participant 4).

The findings are supported by previous studies on workplace conflict and WPB (Buonomo et al., 2020; Balducci et al., 2021; De Wet & Jacobs, 2021) which reported that WPB affects relationships with colleagues, both negatively and positively, as discussed under this sub-theme. It would also appear that the workplace bully often has different facades, targeting some people while being collegial and kind to others. It is unclear, though, why some people are targeted and others not. Considering the detrimental role of work-life conflicts, I believe that WPB has harmful effects on employees' relationships even outside the workplace, as the next sub-theme illustrates.

5.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: The effects of workplace bullying on intimate partner relationships

The narratives of some of the participants indicated that WPB affected their intimate relationships. They reported:

So that's when my husband said: 'You must choose now, your job or your health' (Participant 3)

It didn't affect my marriage, but my husband was getting frustrated. I'm complaining about the same person, about the same things all the time, every time I was with her [the perceived workplace bully]. *A few good days in between, like okay … not good*

days, but zero things [no WPB] *going on. No attacks ... my husband just took everything, and he really tried his best* [to be supportive] (Participant 4).

The findings relating to the effects of WPB on intimate relationships were similar to findings by Buonomo et al. (2020) in their study on the roles of work-life conflict and gender in the relationship between corporate bullying and personal burnout. It was discovered that interference from work in one's personal life can cause much conflict, which reduces employees' job and family satisfaction, and physical and psychological health. Women were more likely than men to struggle with keeping work and personal lives separate; as a result, in many cases, women choose to invest more in their work and careers (Møller, 2003, in Buonomo et al., 2020).

Pellegrini, Gasperin, Gonçalves and Tolfo (2018) highlighted previous findings where bullying behaviour focused on the negative, caused confusion and a struggle to relate to others (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2012), and escalating to detachment from family and social interaction (Freitas et al., 2008). Participants in this study shared their emotions and thoughts with people close to them, partners, parents, children, friends and, at times, with colleagues. It is here that they found a sense of safety, acceptance and trust. It is important to have healthy support networks to help cope with workplace challenges (Pellegrini et al., 2018).

Linking to the feminist RCT, zest or energy comes to mind in relation to participants' accounts of the impact of WPB on their relationships with intimate partners. RCT affirms the role that healthy relationship play in imparting a sense of zest to life. All the participants clearly experienced a diminishment of zest, which was subsumed in feelings of anxiety, frustration, fear and lowered self-esteem. By speaking to their partners, some participants gained a sense of clarity. RCT lists clarity as one of the positive benefits of healthy relationships, and a lack of clarity as a tenet of poor relationships. Clearly, WBP had negative effects on the emotional and physical wellbeing of participants and spilled over into their personal relationships.

5.3.3 Theme 3: Employee support and assistance
An organisation that integrates RCT into their human resource policies will be better equipped to promote growth-fostering relationships because the principles on which RCT is based are mutual empathy and a team culture rather than an individualistic approach to growth and

development (Haskins & Appling, 2017). In such an environment, employees will be open to speaking out when they or others are being treated unjustly.

There were different contentions in participants' narratives about the support they received from their supervisors and/or line managers. Most participants were afraid to speak out, while some said that they took action and reported the bullying. However, their courage was met with negative experiences in relation to the organisations' human resource (HR) protocols and the poor and/or lack of support from HR personal.

Three sub-themes emerged and are discussed next.

5.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: The supportive role of supervisors in the workplace
Some participants found support from their supervisors or line managers. They were able to confide in their supervisors and felt supported by them. These are some of their narratives:

> *I've got a supervisor, so her role is supervision of all the social workers. Sometimes you just feel stuck. ... Sometimes I would call my supervisor and I would say ...* [sighs] *'I just need to talk now,' but then it's more frustration that comes out and then I'd say, 'Okay, sorry that I had to bother you.' Also keep in mind that they have to hear a lot of things. But she does have a manager as well with whom she can debrief. So, our relationship is quite well* (Participant 2).

> *It's* [the supervisor-supervisee relationship] *very good. I am able to go to her any time to debrief, to vent, whatever. I know I don't have to make an appointment. I just go and say what I need to say ... So, I got a very good relationship with her* (Participant 6).

The role that supervisors and managers play in relation to collegial support and making staff feel safe and protected from WPB was also reported in a study by Clausen et al. (2019) who cited Thoits (1986), who argued that managers' social support may constitute a coping resource for targets of corporate bullying.

Blomberg and Rosander (2020), citing Nielsen (2013), state that a supervisor has the ability to influence the work environment for an individual co-worker, but also the work environment as a whole.

RCT emphasises the value of mutual empowerment, empathy and authenticity, stating that incorporating these qualities into an individual's life involves the ability to allow mutual influence, an openness to impact and the ability and willingness to enter fully into the relationship while being aware of an individual's own potential effect on others (Jordan & Romney, 2005; Jordan, 2017). It appears that the supervisors in this study displayed empathy toward the participants and were willing to be in relationship with them. They allowed a space for participants to share.

García et al. (2021) argue that individuals exposed to corporate bullying search for two types of support in their family and friends: instrumental support (practical advice, counselling) and emotional support (moral support, affection, understanding, encouragement and sympathy). Talking with friends and family helps people to re-evaluate their work environments and situations more positively. It may also help individuals accept reality and participate in trying to solve the situation.

5.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Taking action and reporting workplace bullying
There were various views on reporting and taking action against the perceived workplace bully. Some participants reported their experiences to their line managers and did not want the matter to escalate further than the line manager, while some escalated the matter as far as the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA).

> *It was reported to his manager, my manager, everybody was informed. I just decided not to pursue the matter further. But it has been reported to Human Resource and you know, all the managers. I just felt that at that point in time, it was pointless to pursue it further ...* [sighs] (Participant 2).

> *Well, we* [the participant and the perceived workplace bully] *went through the grievance* [protocol of the organisation]. *She with her rep. and me with my rep., and my expectation was that it would never happen again, and she must apologise to me in writing* (Participant 5).

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So, at the time I ran immediately to the CCMA ... and it just didn't go well at the CCMA. And some [newspapers] *papers got wind of it because obviously I told everybody that I could. She was fired and the company had to pay a handsome fee to myself* (Participant 7).

As Blomberg and Rosander (2020) and Patterson et al. (2018) found, employees are often reluctant to take action and report WPB. In the current study, participants were so disillusioned by their adverse experiences of WPB that most chose not to pursue disciplinary and or corrective action.

Taking action and reporting WPB from an RCT perspective would involve being proactive in the growth-fostering relationship and outside of it; it would be about confronting the perceived workplace bully and speaking out by approaching a supervisor or HR person who could assist in mediating and helping the complainant to recover the 'zest' which the theory speaks of. In terms of RCT, an individual's overall sense of worth tends to increase when one takes action. This was certainly the case for some participants in the study who felt empowered when they reported WPB.

5.3.3.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Participants' perceptions and experiences of human resource departments

In terms of RCT, fostering growth relationships is key (Jordan, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial for organisations to ensure employee wellness by creating a culture of good governance that will be perceived as supportive by employees. The experiences of participants in this study indicated that the opposite was the case. Their described experiences with HR personnel were mostly negative. There seem to be a mistrust of HR personnel. Participants did not seem to have confidence in HR systems and processes. For this reason, most reported that they did not pursue action against the perceived workplace bully. These are some of their accounts:

I felt like it was a buddy-buddy thing and the fact that there were things said behind my back. I felt betrayed ... I don't think they [senior management] *were aware of the bullying and I didn't feel it's my place to say anything because she was friends with the head office people. So, I knew I would not get anywhere ... I didn't have anywhere*

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to go. HR you don't talk to ... She [the HR staff member] *is not a very approachable person* (Participant 3).

And I decided that I'm not going to leave it. She was my direct senior and I don't think this person expected me to follow procedure and lay a grievance against her ... I actually walked away. I went to do something and then when I came back two hours later I decided, right, now I'm going to do something about it ... I wanted to set an example ... it's an institutional culture where academic staff can disrespect admin staff. Some employers just make it unbearable for somebody to come to work and then it leads to a constructive dismissal, where the person just gives up their job. I didn't feel comfortable with HR. I didn't trust them (Participant 5).

I still felt stuck [referring to uncooperative attitude by HR in the organisation]. *HR of today is about protecting business reputation and the employer's branding is really important, particularly if you work in massive organisations like I've been in. The Labour Relations Act speaks nothing of it* [WPB]. *Nor does the Basic Conditions of Employment [Act] speak nothing of it as well. A policy is not good enough. It does not hold enough ground to really make* [an impact] *... and a lot of feedback was: If we make this official, like in black and white, legal, then unfortunately the company will have to take liability for it at the beginning of a* [disciplinary] *process. (Participant 7).*

It seems relevant to mention that only two of seven participants (Participants 5 and 7) had insight into their employee rights and knowledge about following the grievance procedures. Participant 2 mentioned that her lack of knowledge about the company's policies and her rights according to the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 were a disadvantage to her.

Leadership and management style also plays a very important role in any organisation, either increasing or decreasing the risk of bullying. Some reported bullying may be ascribed to a breakdown in the relationship and communication between supervisor and subordinates.
The role of HR appeared to be tainted or compromised and it would seem that employees in the current employee-employer context have very little faith and trust in them. The participants of this study refused to report their challenges to HR. They preferred to approach external offices, like unions or the CCMA, then to follow internal communication channels. A

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generalised view is that HR does not uphold confidentiality, that they are there to protect the organisation and not necessarily the employees. Mokgolo (2017) cites Ulrich and Brockbank (2005), highlighting the four key roles of the HR practitioner: HR is human capital developer, an employee advocate, a functional expert and a strategic planner (Mokgolo, 2017). HR is required to remain neutral in disputes, since their roles are multi-layered. It would be the responsibility of HR practitioners to investigate reports of bullying behaviour and determine a way forward for both the target and the bully. This cannot be done without the development and implementation of an anti-bullying policy. Other HR responsibilities include facilitation, managing people, policy writing and implementation, support services, and monitoring and evaluation (Sheehan et al., 2016).

Judging from the participants' accounts, it seems that enhancing growth-producing relationships, mutuality, authenticity, connection, empathy and mutual involvement should be part of the HR processes in organisations. Currently this is clearly not the case.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Effects of workplace bullying on participants' physical and mental health

The tenets on which RCT is based, namely the universal human desire to enjoy and to develop relationships, zest, clarity, action and an overall sense of worth (Haskins & Appling, 2017), are all linked to a sense of wellbeing.

Some participants said that they experienced physical and psychological challenges, and some reported having suicidal thoughts, as a result of the perceived bullying. Some developed physical and chronic medical conditions, while other experienced mental challenges and received therapy. Some were on medication for depression and anxiety. All of these situations emanated from their experiences of WPB. Most alarming was participants' accounts of suicidal thoughts which were directly linked to the perceived WPB. Three sub-themes relating to physical and mental challenges are discussed below.

5.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Participants' physical health challenges exacerbated by workplace bullying

Some participants described the health challenges that emerged either during or sometime after the WPB experience.

So that's when my husband said, 'You must choose now, your job or your health' (Participant 3).

It did affect my health negatively. In 2017, my blood pressure was constantly through the roof, last year as well, it was constantly through the roof. I had a mild stroke .... where my face turned skew (Participant 5).

In their study, Annor and Amponsah-Tawiah (2020) emphasise that health and wellbeing are greatly impacted by WPB, and that this fact is well documented. They further argue that WPB is coupled with decreased job satisfaction, lowered commitment to the organisation, and burnout.

Van den Brande et al. (2017) mention further health impairments such as low energy and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Blomberg and Rosander (2020) also found that physical health challenges are exacerbated by WPB. It is argued that job strain and WPB are adverse working conditions, and that these, along with long working hours, are linked to higher risks of cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes. The status of these claims remains uncertain, however (Xu et al., 2018).

Feijó et al. (2019) further argued that other problems associated with WPB include sleep disturbances, neck and back pain, and absenteeism, which concurs with the finding of Xu et al (2018) regarding vascular disease and diabetes, in that both are related to high levels of stress.

Haskins and Appling (2017) cite Jordan (2009), who said that the principles of RCT promote social justice and a strong sense of social connection, while highlighting the role of power dynamics in wellbeing.

It seems that WPB can result in more than emotional and psychological effects. The physical effects are obvious, too – one participants spoke of actually suffering a stroke as a result of prolonged high blood pressure associated with ongoing stress. Emotional strain can cause negative physical effects on health.

5.3.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: The effects of workplace bullying on participants' mental health

Most participants said that they suffered some form of mental health difficulty as a result of WPB. Apart from the fact that Participant 2 was diagnosed with major depression, her wellbeing was further compromised when she was sexually harassed by a male colleague at her workplace. Harassment is a form of bullying, as described in Chapter Two. Participant 2 was thus confronted with the double blow of trauma and bullying on top of an already existing condition of depression. Her narrative is presented next, followed by that of Participant 3 and Participant 4's descriptions of the effect of WPB on their mental health.

Even through that time I was extremely suicidal ... what contributed to me, the major depression as well also, was the sexual harassment at that workplace. So, there was a lot of factors that led to that [depression], *because when I moved there I was fine.* (Participant 2).

I did see a psychiatrist. I was on medication, but it was not enough ... it was that bad that I wanted to end my life (Participant 3).

And I was a nervous wreck. So, then I went to my GP and I got anxiety medication from her, because I just couldn't cope (Participant 4).

The findings concur with a nation-wide longitudinal study by Lange et al. (2020), conducted in Germany to investigate self-reported WPB on depressive symptoms. The findings also concur with the WHO (2012) definition of depression as a common mental disorder characterised by persistent sadness and loss of interest or pleasure, low energy, guilty feelings, diminished concentration and low sense of self-worth. These are pointed out as potential consequences of bad relationships in RCT. The DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2013) is a diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders. It concurs with the above definition and adds that the individual may further experience physical symptoms such as digestive problems and chronic pain (DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria).

A person diagnosed with depression also experiences the following symptoms: loss of energy, change in appetite (eating more or less), anxiety, and increase or decrease in sleep. They struggle to concentrate, suffer indecisiveness, feelings of worthlessness, guilt, hopelessness,

and thoughts of self-harm or suicide. Depression has a profound effect on how the individual manages other stressful life events.

This feature was clearly evident as I reflected on memos and studied the interview transcripts. I found that bullying has the potential to exacerbate an existing mental health condition and that victims may develop a mental health condition as a direct result of the WPB; for example, post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS). Four of the seven participants disclosed pre-existing diagnoses of either depression or anxiety. Pre-existing conditions such as these seemingly made it more challenging for them to handle the incidents of bullying.

5.3.4.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Suicidal thoughts as a consequence of workplace bullying

This final sub-theme is truly alarming and indicative of the powerlessness and hopelessness that participants experienced because of WPB. From the perspective of RCT, these participants experienced such a strong sense of disconnection from relationships that they felt completely powerless. Their zest was so diminished that some contemplated suicide.

The admission by several participants that the trauma of being bullied left them so emotionally paralysed that they felt that they could not continue living anymore are worrying, as they indicate that workplace bullying may be having similar effects on other women – or men. These were the words of two participants:

My supervisor just gave up on me. Even through that time I was extremely suicidal (Participant 2).

… it took a while before I realised that if I don't get out now … then ... it was that bad that I wanted to end my life (Participant 3).

When looking at the verbatim transcripts of the interviews, it was clear that the participants' sense of wellbeing was affected negatively to the point where some felt they had no recourse to rectifying the situation. Participants were not able to cope with life as a result of prolonged exposure to bullying. Their productivity deteriorated and there was a prevailing sense of disconnection from others, as described by Jordan (2008). This occurrence left the participants feeling misunderstood, violated, in danger and at an impasse (Jordan, 2017).

All the participants said that WPB negatively affected their mental wellness. In a study on the impact of WPB on mental health conducted by Harb, Rayan, and Khashashneh (2021), those who were subjected to WPB experienced worse mental health than those who were not. The exposure to WPB is associated with burnout, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (PTSD) (Harb et al., 2021). Further research by Harb et al. (2021) concurs with statements by Keyes (2005) to the effect that an individual's experience of personal or psychological wellbeing is instrumental to living a 'good' or 'full' life. Similar to the outcomes of growth-fostering relationships, feelings such as enthusiasm and joy (emotional wellbeing), positive functioning, mastery, personal growth and strong interpersonal relationships (psychological wellbeing) contribute to our sense of fulfilment in life.

Being unwell is displayed in behaviours such as fear, anxiety, aggression, low confidence, bullying and distress. These are behaviours that negatively affect the employee as well as the organisation. Workplace stress has been identified as an indicator caused by unreasonable workload demands, unhealthy relationships with colleagues and/or management (Van den Brande et al., 2017). These symptoms of stress have been identified in the current study.

From the RCT perspective, participants had the ability to take action against the perceived workplace bully, but some participants in this study preferred not to do so. This could be attributed to the fact that they had lost their zest and clarity, and that their sense of self-esteem was low as a result of the way they had been treated over an extended period of time.

5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the findings and discussed them according to four key themes that emerged from them. These were examined in the light of the qualitative IPA and feminist RCT, which acted as the framework for understanding the phenomenon under review. The seven participants' lived experiences of corporate bullying were understood from their shared thoughts, experiences and feelings. I found that the IPA was appropriate for the data analysis process, providing clarity regarding the participants' experiences. The findings were validated by the literature and illustrated not only the seriousness of the issue under investigation but the value of studying and reported on this phenomenon.

The following chapter presents the study conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The topic of this qualitative research study was workplace or corporate bullying. The main aim of this qualitative feminist phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of women who had experienced corporate bullying, and to uncover how bullying affected them and their families. There were three specific objectives; first, to explore and describe the understanding and experiences of women employees who were victims of workplace bullying; second, to construct meaning by interpreting perceptions about the phenomenon through conversations, and discover what policies were used to manage bullying in the workplace, thus identifying potential gaps in legislation and policies; third, to identify the influence of corporate bullying on the wider family unit and to recommend changes for occupational social work intervention and strategies.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO RCT AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In reflecting on the impact that bullying had on the participants and in light of findings derived from the literature, I found RCT helpful as an interpretive lens. It provided a useful theoretical framework against which to view the phenomenon, helping to explain why targeted people take so long to recover from bullying. There appears to be a general lack of relational awareness in the workplace, which results in people being unable to address the failures, concerns, pains and imbalances that affect their mutuality. This often results in mutual disconnection. In my opinion it is a *central relational paradox* that is implemented instead, especially in instances of bullying where the target has the desire for relationship with others but this is accompanied by fear and hurt from previous experiences; these steer them away from engaging in relationship building. This is a strategy used to protect oneself from getting hurt again, but which at the same time leads to loss of authenticity because the person tends to adjust themselves to the expectations of others. With corporate bullying, employees may carry out this behaviour to fit in and avoid being targeted again.

With reference to the preceding discussion, the first two objectives of the study have been met.

However, the final objective, i.e., to identify the effect of corporate bullying on the wider family unit in order to recommend changes for occupational social work intervention and strategies was not adequately met. This was because of several factors related to limitations in terms of time and the sensitivity of the topic. These situational factors prevented the attainment of the last objective.

6.3 PHENOMENOLOGY AS A PHILOSOPHY AND RESEARCH METHOD

Phenomenology, as discussed previously, is both a philosophy and a research method. Phenomenology does not seek cause-effect relationships, nor does it generalise, but is a process of observation and analysis of the 'things themselves' in a new way. I chose to draw on hermeneutic phenomenology, which involves the study of everyday life as it is experienced directly, and which cannot be understood unless reflected on. Emphasis was placed on Heidegger's concept of 'being-in-the-world', which suggests that we as individuals exist within a social context and cannot be detached from this world (Pascal, 2010).

While working as a professional social worker and having been a target of bullying in a workplace myself, I reflected on this. In this feminist phenomenological study, I made use of snowball sampling, through which seven females were identified as participants because they were survivors of corporate bullying. The participants differed with regard to social background, race, age and career experiences, and all worked in different companies in Cape Town, in the Western Cape. From a social work and social work supervision and management perspective, the theoretical framework I selected and applied in this study was the Relational Cultural Theory, a feminist approach that focuses on the quality of relational experiences in enhancing growth-fostering relationships.

Phenomenology was found to be best suited for this type of explorative research as it seeks deeper exploration of an almost 'invisible' phenomenon, which aligns well with the social work notion of studying a person, group or community 'in context'. The approach was humanistic and recognized the individual in context of their lifeworld. In this study 'being-in-the-world' was seen as a holistic phenomenon and was understood as the intersubjectivity of connectedness and interdependence in relationships. The participants described these relationships as an inextricable part of their experiences of corporate bullying. This is in line

with feminist phenomenology, which recognises relationships as an integral part of the lifeworld and the development of every individual.

Furthermore, the impact of the environment may be viewed as bi-directional; while people are perceived as affected by their environments, they also have the capacity to change it. Part of our role as social workers is to empower individuals to change.

6.4 INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AS A RESEARCH DESIGN

In using the IPA in this study, I was able to obtain the views and voices of participants in their own words, and to learn how they understood their experiences in their social contexts. RCT was the approach applied for interpretation, meaning making and reconstruction of the stories as told by participants in the study. This helped me to gain a concrete understanding and a holistic view of the participants' experiences.

From this study it would seem that happiness and wellbeing result when individuals engage in growth-fostering relationships. This was certainly the case for some participants in this study, who, in relating their experiences, seemed to find a sense of acceptance, peace and empowerment. Linking with RCT, the study highlights that people move toward independence and autonomy through the development of meaningful relationships with others. This was evident in participants' narratives regarding relationships, either with the bully or, more importantly, with intimate partners and people with whom they had close relationships. This highlighted the issue of social justice and the importance of relationships to human development, in particular in terms of HR in the respective organisations. It was clear that many participants lacked knowledge of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. The values of mutual empowerment, authenticity and empathy are central to RCT as these qualities exemplify mutual influence, being open to impact and having the willingness to enter into a relationship while being awareness of an individual's own potential impact on others.

6.5 CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO THE MAIN THEMES

Theme 1: Participants' perceptions and experiences of WPB

Participants' perceptions of the workplace bully revolved around power dynamics and different forms of bullying that occurred in the workplace. It seemed that most of the perceived

workplace bullies in this study were in a position of authority over the participants. This power position placed the participants at a disadvantage, affecting their relationship with the perceived bully and with colleagues, as well as relationships with significant others outside the workplace. Participants and others feared being rejected and/or judged by other people throughout their trials. Further to this, there is a general lack of societal understanding of mental illness and mental health conditions and a lack of education and awareness in increasingly stressful work environments. The same lack of awareness and understanding applies to corporate bullying and its potentially devastating effects.

Theme 2: The effects of WPB on participants' relationships

The effects of WPB on participants' relationships with colleagues and significant others outside the workplace were also investigated. The repercussions were not only emotional but also physical. Thus, the effects of perceived bullying had physiological and mental health implications for participants in this study. Based on the findings, corporate bullying had a clearly negative effects on the wellness and wellbeing of the targets, as well as on their life experiences. The effect of corporate bullying varies from person to person, and affects the individual, the family and the organisation. Several other factors are affected, too. Absenteeism from work, loss of productivity, high staff turnover and financial cost to companies are just some of the adverse effects of workplace bullying that were identified in this study.

RCT stresses the importance of growth-fostering relationships, and that there needs to be a 'relational flow'. This refers to the movement of relationship from connection to disconnection and back to connection. The reconnection is only possible when the individual's self-esteem is unharmed. This study highlighted that participants' self-esteem was harmed to such an extent by bullying that they were not able to enter fully into their various relationships and experienced instead a strong sense of disconnection from which they were unable to recover. Many individuals never experienced the re-connection that is indicative of a healthy relationship at work. It also became difficult for them to trust other people in the workplace, which implies a sense of disconnection from people who had nothing to do with the bullying. Participants spoke about a lack of trust of all colleagues as a result of bullying by a superior. Personal relationships also became strained.

Theme 3: Employee support and assistance for persons who experienced WPB

The support of supervisors in the workplace was one solace for most participants. However, others reported that the supervisor was the perceived bully who used a position of power to perpetuate the unfair treatment of employees. In such cases, participants found it difficult to report the perceived bullying. Those who had the courage and felt supported by colleagues and significant others outside the workplace were more likely to take action. Unfortunately, many were disillusioned with how HR personnel handled WPB. Most did not have a positive experience after reporting the perceived bullying to HR because for most, the matter was not addressed satisfactorily.

Organisations do not educate their staff or do not have appropriate grievance procedures on corporate bullying and therefore targets often misread bullying behaviour, doubting themselves until the situation has become almost unbearable. This lack of understanding and interpreting of corporate bullying makes it challenging to address, as does the lack of clear policy in South Africa to address the phenomenon. In my experience, it was easier for those in positions of authority to blame the target or highlight mental illness than to address the bullying behaviour in the workplace, which simply exacerbated the situation for the victim.

Theme 4: The effects of WPB on participants' physical and mental health

Findings in this study further exposed that mental health conditions could be either a contributing factor or a consequence of corporate bullying. Either way, the potential outcomes had a devastating and sometimes long-term effect on the targets and their families.

Possible outcomes of corporate bullying include, but are not limited to, health concerns, stress, anxiety, depression, fear, emotional distress, low self-esteem, feelings of rejection, isolation, intimidation and insecurity, which, in turn, affect people's productivity and relationships with others. Anxiety and depression were found to be the most common outcomes for the participants of this study, both as a consequence of bullying and as a contributing factor to their feelings of being able to respond to it appropriately. Environmental, psychosocial and other external factors contributed to the participants being unwell, thereby making them more susceptible to being bullied. It exposed their vulnerability and emotional instability. In these instances, participants found it difficult to deal with the bully and the bully's behaviour. They did not have the energy or the capacity to address the phenomenon.

Suicide ideation and/or attempts were also reported and had been a reality for some of the participants. Although there is no direct evidence of the link between suicide and corporate bullying, as an EAP practitioner I had a case where an employee committed suicide as a result of corporate bullying. Various mental health conditions experienced by employees may be a consequence of corporate bullying.

6.6 CONCLUSIONS ON REFLEXIVITY

I thought it was important to bring in a section on reflexivity in Chapter Four, Methodology, because of my personal experience of WPB. Throughout this research, I became increasingly aware of the trauma I had experienced. Nearly three years later, having resigned from the environment where the bullying occurred, healing is still in progress. I did not have any pre-existing mental health conditions. However, as the bullying progressed over time, there was persistent exposure to stressful situations which left me feeling anxious, unworthy and intimidated. I presented with PTSS-like symptoms, which are described in the Chapter Two.

Mental illness per se and mental health conditions are still very stigmatised in society at large and particularly in certain cultures, with the result that people do not speak out or report it and avoid getting the help they need. From a cultural perspective, depression is not acknowledged in terms of several local indigenous cultures. Some may not have the words or terminology to describe it, as was described by one of the participants who said she did not know what it was that she was experiencing, not having the vocabulary to explain the symptoms of depression, with which she was later diagnosed.

Concluding this study was not an easy task. I have had to reflect on what I have learned about myself and others. I have definitely grown in areas of complex relationship-building and new understanding with the help of the RCT, which has increased my awareness of the importance of growth-producing relationships. As a theory it assumes that there will be connection and disconnection throughout a person's life. How we engage and choose to overcome in those moments of disconnection will affect future relationships. This process is explained as 'relational flow'; the cyclical movement in relationships in terms of connection, disconnection, the repair thereof and the move back to connection. My self-esteem was harmed in the workplace as well as later, in personal relationships. I realised that I struggle with trust, and

this limits me when engaging in other relationships. I have also learned that I am not always my authentic self, which is required for mutuality to take place.

However, growth-fostering relationships require *mutual* empathy and *mutual* engagement, where both or all parties involved have a responsibility in the relationship. It becomes challenging when only one person is doing all the work in a relationship, as does happen, often causing relationship breakdown. Bullying encompasses a power imbalance and negative behaviour that deliberately causes the less powerful party to be harmed and made to feel inferior. Bullying directly or indirectly causes disconnection. It misuses the emotional availability of the other person and shows lack of mutual respect.

6.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Time was limited and did not allow me to interview family members of the participants to gain holistic insight on their views and experiences of what transpired, and how the bullying affected the family unit as a result of trauma of one family member. Owing to time and other limitations, as explained in Chapter Four, I was also not able to consult policies used by organisations. However, I did gain a strong impression that if policies existed, bullying was too often not recognised or acknowledged by those in power, so that the policies were of little value.

Although I was employed in the field of EAP, my previous employer did not approve of the topic or consider it worth examining in that workplace. I was therefore not allowed to gather any information relating to policies or to draw participants from the company or clients I was seeing at the time. This impacted the timeline of the study in that sourcing participants through snowball sampling became more challenging and time consuming. One or two willing participants could not be interviewed because of this restriction.

The contextual factors that impacted snowball sampling in this study were an even greater challenge in that most participants were not able to refer me to another possible participant, which was required by the recruiting method. Instead, there were random referrals from various participants, not from the same or even similar circles. The number of participants was small (only seven) and there were time constraints having to meet during their lunch time. While the choice of sampling method was justified in terms of the invisibility of the phenomenon and the

sensitivity of the topic, from a research planning and implementation point of view, I would not recommend snowball sampling for post graduate university-based research.

Although I gained great insight from the seven participants and the in-depth interview format, transcriptions and memo keeping, one of the further shortcomings of this study was that males were not included in the research sample. As highlighted in the literature review, corporate bullying affects everyone, regardless of gender. I could have gained much more knowledge and understanding had I interviewed males as well as females, perhaps uncovering gendered experiences and the differences in how males and females dealt with corporate bullying. However, a comparison of male and female ways of handling bullying was not the scope of this research, and I believe that by focusing on females I have nevertheless uncovered important aspects of this hidden phenomenon.

In retrospect, I could have combined in-depth interviews with a focus group discussion to enrich the data. Because of the invisibility of the phenomenon and because of the fear that was observed, this may have introduced a different dynamic, and much would have depended on how the participants felt about sharing experiences in a well-facilitated shared group experience.

Another option might have been to conduct workshops, which would facilitate being able to raise awareness and educate staff on the challenge of workplace bullying. Workshops might have opened the way to pursue further interviews and discussions on the phenomenon from a practitioner-researcher perspective.

6.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.8.1 Recommendations for policy

Given the harm that bullying in the workplace causes, it is the responsibility of both the employee and the employer to empower and educate themselves by knowing their constitutional rights. The Employment Equity Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act provide the policy guidelines for safe working environments for all employees. HR and policy managers should develop organisational policies and ensure that staff are appropriately inducted and trained to create more awareness on the topic.

It is the role of HR and management to put policies in place that protect all employees, and to ensure that the policies are implemented. Trust relationships need to be built between HR and other staff members, and all persons should be treated equally and with respect. Because employees spend a lot of time at work, an inclusive environment needs to be created by employers for all employees to be happy and productive.

It is therefore important that social workers, occupational social workers, HR practitioners and management ensure that adequate HR support services are available for employees. Social workers have the advantage of being able to empower staff through training and development and create awareness about the phenomenon. Further to this, a safe and fair organisational and work culture should be mandatory, as guided by the SACSSP, and are reflected in organisational policy.

Social workers should be encouraged to attend CPD to promote growth-fostering relationships with others, to help them implement mutual engagement and mutuality, and to foster authenticity while allowing the other person to bring about change, and vice versa. Everything that they learn in short CPD courses could be imported back into the organisations for which they work.

Social workers need to work on personal growth and development in light of their demanding jobs which involve an almost continual engagement with human beings in distress. They need to be personally self-aware and able to recover from a high degree of exposure to the distress, conflicts and personal difficulties of others. This is where social work supervision and practice research become an integral and necessary part of professional development. Social work supervision is extremely important and needs much more attention in South Africa and the Western Cape. Without it, social workers easily become overwhelmed, struggle with work overload and the emotional consequences of their stressful jobs, and can suffer burnout. This renders them less and less effective. They therefore need strong, empathetic and consistent supervision and support. Social workers should also continue with CPD to remain upskilled and abreast of the latest theories so as to encourage and enhance growth-fostering organisations.

6.8.2 Recommendations for practice

Corporate bullying is promoted in environments where there are high levels of stress, poor leadership and poor organisation. As businesses compete for market share in an increasingly competitive environment, demands on staff becomes greater and internal competition increases, creating tensions amongst staff. The workplace can easily become uncomfortable and fuelled with animosity and employees who are angry with one another. Professional jealousy occurs in such environments. This can lead to staff feeling isolated and insecure. This situation becomes unbearable if workplace tensions develop into bullying, as defined in Chapter One of this study.

Awareness of corporate bullying needs to be raised at broader societal level and all staff at every company must know about it. Companies should start living up to the values and visions that they normally emblazon on their walls. Staff in companies need to educate themselves on their rights as employees and be knowledgeable of the protocols, chains of command and correct lines of communication.

Organisations need to empower employees who have been victims so that they can regain their sense of identity and better manage others in the workplace. It is also important that bullies are made aware of their actions because they, too, need counselling to ensure that the behaviour is not repeated.

Companies and organisations should promote staff wellbeing, which should include addressing issues such as corporate bullying or conflict. This would limit the risk of bullying behaviour. Communication and respect for each person is key. HR and management are also responsible for addressing the misuse of power.

6.8.3 Recommendations for future studies

Future social work and research studies should focus on:

- males and females as survivors or targets of WPB
- HR policies that address WPB in government and NPOs where social workers are employed
- the impact of WPB on social workers' mental health and
- the impact of WPB on social workers' performance.

6.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the conclusions and recommendations derived from the study. It was important to draw conclusions that brought in both the findings and the theoretical framework, and to show how the IPA helped to frame and understand the topic of workplace bullying. I believe my personal reflections formed an important part of this research; their inclusion may make this study somewhat different from most qualitative studies, but I felt that their inclusion was warranted in light of both the topic and the theoretical framework used. The style of reporting conforms with the principles of feminist IPA. This was a feminist phenomenological study, and I believe the originality and creativity I displayed in presenting the conclusions in the way I have make their inclusion relevant.

Recommendations for practice and policy are an important aspect in this chapter and will assist in guiding the development of frameworks for addressing WPB.

6.10 FINAL CONCLUSION

As human beings, we thrive on connection with others. The RCT theoretical framework that guided this research was valuable to my development of a critical understanding of occupational social work, deepening and broadening my view of healthy workplace practice for social workers. In this way I believe that it contributes to the body of knowledge on workplace bullying and on the topic of healthy workplace relationships.

It is clear that sound human relationships in the workplace are complex and require constant work to maintain, and that the impact of mismanaging workplace relationships can be far reaching to human beings. It is also clear workplace bullying affects many more people than the number who report it; it is a particularly hidden and difficult-to-identify phenomenon, easy to disguise and to deny, almost invisible, yet toxic. It is likely to affect people in a society that is already stressed, under pressure economically and subject to historical imbalances in power and social status, as is the case in South Africa. However, it is not confined to South Africa but is prevalent globally, wherever inequality in power relations exist, which the literature attests.

As a feminist theory, RCT was helpful in this study, guiding me through a process of healing. As a practising social worker and researcher, I have gained much insight into combining

feminist phenomenology and RCT, in terms of building relationships with clients and improving relationships in the working environment.

Bullying is not an individual problem. It is a problem embedded in society, and it is the responsibility of the company or organisation to ensure that it is handled correctly and that incidents of it are swiftly sorted out for the safety and wellbeing of employees. The challenge we face in South Africa is that bullying has not been clearly identified and there are no official policies and procedures in place to protect targets. This makes it more challenging for policy makers and organisations to address the issue. HR managers and supervisors struggle to identify it, which leads to the current invisibility that this study sought to expose.

It is important that companies and organisations positively invest in the wellbeing of their staff, which could assist in the management and prevention of mental health concerns. This would encourage employees to be happy and healthy, enjoy improved work and personal relationships and, to the benefit of companies, become more productive. This, in turn, benefits the workplace and the wider community.

Reflecting on my own experience and spending time listening to the narratives of the participants in this study made this study a rewarding journey of learning and, I believe, contributed to the body of knowledge on workplace bullying. I am grateful to the individuals who shared their lived experiences of corporate bullying with me and trust that they will regain their zest and self-worth as they pursue growth-fostering relationships in the workplace, as well as in other areas of their lives.

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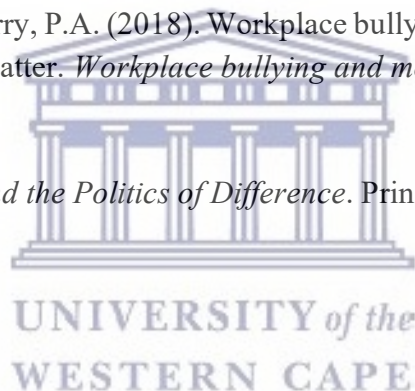
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APPENDIX 1   ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIVISION

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville   7535
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09 November 2017

Ms H De Voux
Social Work
Faculty of Community and Health Science

Ethics Reference Number: HS17/9/10

Project Title: Lived experiences of corporate bullying.

Approval Period: 08 November 2017 _ 08 November 2018

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of
the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above
mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted
to the Ethics Committee for approval. Please remember to submit a progress report in
good time for annual renewal.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of
the study.

Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape

PROVISIONAL REC NUMBER - 130416-049

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ANNEXURE 2A (I) (a): INFORMATION SHEET: EMPLOYEES (ENGLISH)

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-9592277, Fax: 27 21-9592845

E-mail: mmcdonald@uwc.ac.za

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: *Lived experiences of corporate bullying*

What is this study about?

This is a research project to be conducted by Hilary de Voux, a Master of Social Work student at the University of the Western Cape. We would like to invite you to participate in this research project about the phenomenon of 'corporate bullying'. We aim to understand and gain knowledge on the phenomenon and its effects on employees.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to participate in an approximately 60–90-minute interview with open-ended questions from the interview schedule. Participants in the study will be requested to be interviewed separately. Should you choose to participate in the study, I will arrange a location for the discussions and/or interview convenient to you. The questions that will be asked in the study relate to corporate bullying and the impact it may/may not have had on persons with corporate bullying experience. The questions further look into the responsibilities of various stakeholders within the working environment, the implications of corporate bullying and the policies in place.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

This research project involves making audiotapes of the interview with you. This will be used to capture all the information relating to the study as precisely and truthfully as possible. The audiotapes will also prevent the loss of valuable information. The interviews will then be transcribed onto a computer. The audio tapes will be kept in a secured location at all times and the computer data will also be protected. The audio tapes will be destroyed at the end of the research study. All responses will be treated with full confidentiality and anyone who takes part in the research will be identified only by code numbers or false names. As a participant, you may request a copy of your interview transcript. The interviews will be analysed on a computer by myself. At the end of the research a report will be completed, and results may be

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published in peer reviewed journals. No research participant will be identifiable from any publication.

What are the risks of this research?

There may be some risks from participating in this research study. Personal or confidential information may be shared, or you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. Feel free to stop participation at any time if you do not wish it to continue. Inform the researcher of this decision. Counselling can be arranged and provided, should it be needed. The participant will be referred to a relevant social service provider.

What are the benefits of this research?

The research may not change your present situation or the past, however, the researcher aims to better understand the phenomenon of corporate bullying and the impact it has on employees in Cape Town, Western Cape. Furthermore, results established from this research will be used to make recommendations for best practice. We trust that employees, employers and the wider community may benefit from the information gathered in this study, to improve the working conditions as well as interpersonal working relationships and furthermore, prevent incidents of corporate bullying from occurring.

Do I have to be in this research?

The participation in this research is completely voluntary. You have the right to decline participation. There is no penalty in declining or stopping participation.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Hilary de Voux at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Hilary at 072 800 7757 or via email: **2202484@myuwc.ac.za.**

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Head of Department: Dr M Londt (mlondt@uwc.ac.za) 021/959 2277

Acting Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences: Prof R Swart (rswart@uwc.ac.za)

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

ANNEXURE 2B (I): CONSENT FORM: EMPLOYEES (ENGLISH)

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27   21-9592277,   Fax: 27   21-9592845

E-mail: mmcdonald@uwc.ac.za

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Lived experiences of Corporate bullying

The study has been described to me in language that I understand, and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

Participant's name……………….……………………..

Participant's signature……….…..……….…….……..

Witness…………………………….

Date………………………………

Should you have any questions regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact the study coordinator:

Study Coordinator's Name: Dr M Minnaar-Mcdonald

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535

Telephone: (021)959-2277

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TOPIC : Lived experiences of Corporate bullying

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

GENDER :   *AGE :*   *RACE :*

QUALIFICATIONS :

SKILLS/EXPERTISE :

OCCUPATION :

SETTING :

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION : The main question to be investigated in this study is exploratory and descriptive : "What are the lived experiences of workplace/corporate bullying as perceived by employees and in a South African employment and labour rights-based context ?"

Questions for the data collection using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

1. **Tell me about your experiences of being bullied?**

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Prompts: Where and when did this happen? How did you interpret what was happening? Who was the perpetrator?

2. What were your thoughts about the context/events?

Prompts: Did you have expectations about what was to happen? Did you seek help? Where? If not, what prevented you?

3. What was your first/subsequent reactions?

Prompts: How did you come to a decision to act or do something about your concerns? What were the employer concerns? Was the bullying /perpetrator addressed

APPENDIX 5   TURNITIN REPORT

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APPENDIX 6 EDITOR'S LETTER

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24 October 2022

To Whom It May Concern

I, Jane Mqamelo, ID number 611120 0014 08 and a member of the Professional Editors'
Guild, do herewith confirm that I have conducted an English proofreading and grammar edit
on a dissertation by Hilary de Voux (student number 2202484) entitled

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COPORATE BULLYING

At the time of sending, to the best of my knowledge, it was error free.

Professional
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Jane Mqamelo
Associate Member

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