

Theoretical Explanations for Bullying in School: How Ecological Processes Propagate Perpetration and Victimization

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Abstract Bullying is a complex social dynamic that can best be understood by using various theoretical frameworks. The current article uses social capital theory, dominance theory, the theory of humiliation, and organizational culture theory to better understand the motivations behind bullying behavior, bullying's negative effects on victims, and how school culture and climate play a role in the prevalence of bullying. Specifically, the acquisition and maintenance of social capital and the desire for dominance are prime motivating factors for the initiation and continuation of bullying perpetration. The lack of social capital experienced by victims serves to maintain victims in their current role and prevents them from gaining social status. Further, the domination used by bullies to subjugate victims results in intense humiliation that has lasting negative effects on victims, such as anger and depression. The overall culture and climate of the school setting impacts the prevalence and severity of bullying behavior, highlighting the need for whole school bullying interventions. Implications for social work practice are discussed.

Keywords Bullying · Victimization · Theory · Humiliation · Trauma

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Bullying is one of the most pervasive issues affecting American youth and schools. According to the 2005–2006 national Health Behavior in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Survey, 34.4 % of U.S. students in Grades 6 through 10 reported bullying others in the past 30 days (Ha, 2015). However, rates of verbal bullying perpetration were higher (i.e., 37.4 %), while rates of relational bullying were slightly lower (i.e., 27.2 %; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). About 27.8 % of youth reported bullying victimization (School Crime Supplement; Robers, Kemp, & Truman, 2013), however rates of specific forms of victimization are higher (e.g., 41.0 % reported relational bullying victimization and 36.5 % reported verbal bullying victimization; Wang et al. 2009). Further, bullying is an international problem and in a sample of 202,056 youth from 40 countries, 26.9 % reported involvement in the bullying dynamic (Craig et al., 2009).

Involvement in the bullying dynamic puts youth at risk for a host of negative emotional, behavioral, social, and educational outcomes. As compared with bullies, victims, and bully/victims, noninvolved youth consistently report better mental health outcomes (e.g., Lester, Cross, & Shaw, 2012; Menesini, Modena, & Tani, 2009; Pollastri, Cardemil, & O'Donnell, 2009). Victims and bully/victims are at an especially high risk for anxiety and depression, while bullies and bully/victims are at risk for negative behavioral outcomes such as proactive and reactive aggression (Burton, Florell, & Gore, 2013; Menesini et al., 2009; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Due to their poor mental health and aggression, bullies, victims, and bully/victims often experience problematic peer relationships (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011; Kvarme, Helseth, Saeteren, & Natvig, 2010; Rodkin & Berger, 2008). Finally, compared to nonvictimized youth, victims also reported lower school connectedness (You et al., 2008) and higher levels of

school dissatisfaction (Dulmus, Sowers, & Theriot, 2006). Given the large number of youth involved in the bullying dynamic coupled with the devastating consequences of this involvement, it is vital for researchers, practitioners, and school personnel to understand what motivates bullying behavior as well as the detrimental effects on victims. Theory is a useful tool to illuminate the social process of bullying.

Theories Explaining the Bullying Dynamic

Theories are used to explain, understand, or predict phenomena (Dubin, 1978). The use of theory is particularly important to illuminate social processes, such as school bullying. Given the complexity of bullying behavior, multiple theories are needed to fully explicate this social dynamic and understand what motivates bullying behavior. Further, theory can also help elucidate the negative victim outcomes associated with bullying and explain how the organizational culture and climate of schools is associated with the prevalence of bullying behavior. The purpose of the current paper is to use the frameworks of social capital theory, dominance theory, the theory of humiliation, and organizational culture theory to understand motivations for bullying behavior, the negative impact bullying has on victims, and the role of the organizational culture and climate of the school on bullying behavior.

Social Capital Theory: A Missing Link for Victims and a Motivation for Bullying Behavior

Social capital refers to the benefits gained from social relationships (Putnam, 2000). Specifically, individuals form and invest in social relationships with the expectation of fulfilling goals and profiting from their interactions with others (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001). Putnam described the mutual benefit of social capital as the force that drives people to maintain social networks: “Social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1995; p 67). Social capital can be categorized as either bonding social capital or bridging social capital. *Bonding social capital* consists of social ties (i.e., interpersonal relationships) between similar individuals who belong to a homogenous group that creates a feeling of cohesion and shared belonging, whereas *bridging social capital* consists of social ties with people outside the homogenous group that creates a wider social network (Beugelsdijk & Smulders, 2003; Putnam, 2000). According to social capital theory, individuals invest in social relationships to access the resources embedded within these relationships.

Social capital theorists argue that social ties offer four beneficial resources (Lin, 2001; Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2001). First, social ties provide access to *information* about opportunities and choices that might not be available to those outside of the relationship. As applied to adolescent social networks, youth with social ties to the popular crowd likely have access to information about after school social events where they might interact with and form strong bonds with high status peers. Bonding with high status peers is a form of social capital that increases social standing and decreases the chances of being bullied and/or socially ostracized. Second, social ties with individuals connected to people with power are beneficial because these individuals might be able to *influence* the person in power. For example, having a social tie with the “queen bee’s” best friend might provide protection from being the target of relational bullying. Similarly, being friends with a member of a bully’s entourage could increase the chances of being protected from becoming a victim. Third, social ties provide individuals with *social credentials*; specifically, being socially connected to certain individuals indicates access to resources. For example, if a moderately popular girl starts dating the football star, this social tie increases her social capital. This dating relationship would potentially connect her to all of the resources or social credentials the football star possesses (e.g., respect, popularity, social engagements, social ties to other football players) and might subsequently increase her chances of being incorporated into the popular group of girls and gaining social status. Amassing social credentials can also provide protection against being bullied because adolescents are more likely to befriend someone with many social credentials as a way of gaining access to the other person’s social resources. Fourth, social relationships *reinforce* an individual’s identity and sense of self-worth. Being a member of a social group with others who share similar interests and values is a way of obtaining emotional support and affirmation. Thus, having a group of friends at school provides validation of an individual’s self-worth and is a potential source of support (Lin, 2001; Lin et al., 2001). Social capital theorists examine the ways in which individuals access these four benefits of social relationships (i.e., how individuals capitalize on social relationships and use the resources of those relationships) as well as how groups benefit from social relationships (i.e., groups amass and protect social capital and this social capital then enhances group members’ lives; Lin et al., 2001).

The theory of social capital is often applied to business and economics (Beugelsdijk & Smulders, 2003); however, this theory is also pertinent to the school setting. Social capital in the school setting is best represented by friends and social status. Friendships provide youth with support and often buffer against social stressors such as peer

rejection (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011), whereas social status indicates popularity and power. Friendships and social status do not necessarily go together; that is, youth might have social capital in the form of a few or many friends, but might not be viewed as popular or vice versa.

Social Capital and Bullying Victimization

Youth victimized by bullying have few friends, and in turn, have low social status (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011; Scholte et al., 2008) resulting in minimal social capital. Even when bullied youth have friends, these friendships do not provide social capital because victims' friends are often rejected by the larger peer group outside the friendship (Scholte et al., 2008). Although having one or a few friends could serve to reinforce a victim's self-worth, victims' friendships likely do not increase their access to valuable social information, improve their social credentials, or provide avenues to influence powerful social figures in the school. Further, victims' limited social capital likely precludes them from being invited to social gatherings where they would have the opportunity to interact and perhaps bond with peers who could provide social capital.

Victims' lack of social capital intensifies and prolongs their victimization experiences and many victims lack friends or acquaintances who can protect them from being bullied. For example, victims are unlikely to receive help from bystanders given that research has shown only 10 to 20 % of bystanders intervened to protect victims of bullying (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Evans & Smokowski, 2015; Hawkins et al., 2001; Salmivalli, Lappalainen, & Lagerpetz, 1998). Thus, bullying behavior often continues uninterrupted. Acquiring additional social capital in the form of one supportive friend or a small group of friends willing to support the victim could help a victim escape further bullying. However, victims are often seen as undesirable friends because of their low social status and social awkwardness, making it difficult for victims to acquire either friends or additional social capital.

Social Capital and Bullying Perpetration

On the other hand, bullies often have an easier time acquiring social capital and use bullying tactics as a means of amassing social capital in the form of social status (Pellegrini, 2002). Bullies exert power over weaker peers, relegating those peers to a low position in the social hierarchy. Although bullies are usually disliked (Rodkin & Berger, 2008) they are often perceived as popular by their peer group (de Bruyn, Cillessen, & Wissink, 2010; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003). Perceived popularity indicates social status and is a form of social capital because it indicates that peers

think of bullies as having power and social prestige. This power protects bullies from becoming victims and increases the likelihood of their peers rallying behind them. Indeed, bullies who are able to effectively use intimidation and humiliation tactics often become the leaders of their cliques (Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999). Having a group of devoted followers reinforces an individual's self-worth, which is one of the benefits of social capital. Further, being a group leader provides opportunities for making social connections with leaders of other groups, and thus expanding the individual's social credentials through bridging social capital. Once a group amasses social power, group members benefit from that social power and strive to maintain it, often times using bullying tactics as means to stay on top.

Bully/victims might also turn to bullying perpetration as a means of acquiring social capital, improving their social status in the classroom, and ending their victimization. For example, as classmates scramble for social capital, bully/victims are likely victimized, resulting in a low social status and a lack of social capital. However, rather than withdrawing like most victims, bully/victims might search out weaker classmates to bully in an effort to obtain social capital and improve their social status. In this regard bully/victims mimic the behavior of the bullies and bully weaker classmates in an effort to obtain social capital.

In summary, social capital refers to the resources embedded in social relationships. Both individuals and groups benefit from the resources of information, social influence, social credentials, and reinforcement of self-worth that social ties provide. Victims of bullying have few friends or social ties, and thus, have minimal social capital, which prevents them from exiting their role as a victim. Conversely, bullies use bullying tactics as a means of acquiring social capital in the form of perceived popularity. Youth often perceive bullies as powerful and popular, which serves as a form of social capital that protects bullies' social status. Finally, bully/victims attempt to end their victimization and gain social capital by bullying weaker peers.

Dominance Theory: A Motivation for Bullying Behavior

Although Social Dominance Theory (SDT; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and dominance theory (Long & Pellegrini, 2003) are closely aligned, SDT focuses on group-based social hierarchies whereas dominance theory centers on individual-based social hierarchies. The fundamental tenant of SDT argues that all societies consist of group-based social hierarchies that are based on gender (e.g., males have more power than females), age (e.g., adults have more power than children), and an arbitrary-set

system (e.g., socially significant group differences such as ethnicity or social class that create hierarchies; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). These group-based social hierarchies are formed through the mechanisms of oppression, discrimination, and injustice. Dominant groups oppress less-powerful groups to form a hierarchy with one or a few dominant groups at the top while subordinate groups are forced to the bottom. The dominant group possesses a disproportionate amount of "...positive social value, or all those materials and symbolic things for which people strive" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 31), whereas the subordinate groups possess disproportionate amounts of negative social value. In group-based social hierarchies, the social status and power that individuals possess is derived from their group membership rather than individual characteristics (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Dominance Theory and Bullying Perpetration

The desire for power and dominance is a central motivating factor that fuels bullying behavior and bullies use intimidation and humiliation as a means of obtaining power. Social Dominance theory (SDT; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and dominance theory (Long & Pellegrini, 2003) provide insight into the bullying dynamic. Both theories indicate that youth bully one another in their attempts to gain group- and individual-levels of social dominance, and then maintain their social status through ongoing bullying. In other words, bullying perpetration is used as means of establishing and maintaining dominance.

Bullying is a group process and the peer group dictates whether a bully can establish dominance (Salmivalli, 2010). For example, if classmates respect and support the bully, the bully gains dominance and social power within the classroom. Further, if the bully becomes the leader of a clique of admiring followers, the clique members might experience heightened power within the classroom based on their membership in a group led by a powerful, respected individual. To maintain social dominance, this group would use ongoing bullying as a means of oppressing less powerful members of the class. Indeed, youth who desire dominance act aggressively and bully others to gain social status (Long & Pellegrini, 2003).

In contrast to group-based social hierarchies, individual-based social hierarchies are formed when an individual gains social status and power using personal characteristics such as a charismatic leadership style or intelligence (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). For example, in the bullying dynamic, "ringleader" bullies can usually be identified (Salmivalli, 2010; p. 113) and these youth might use their charisma and skill for humiliating less powerful classmates as a means of gaining social prestige and establishing dominance. Indeed, research has suggested that bullying is

a successful method of obtaining dominance; as compared with nonaggressive boys in sixth grade, aggressive boys had more access to girls (i.e., dated more; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001) and bullies were often viewed as popular by their classmates (Cillessen & Mayeaux, 2004; de Bruyn et al., 2010; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Vaillancourt et al., 2003). However, bullies are not always successful in their quest for dominance and some do not obtain popularity. Certain characteristic such as physical attractiveness, athleticism, and stylish clothing increase the likelihood that bullies will obtain dominance and be viewed as powerful and popular by their classmates (Vaillancourt et al., 2003).

Both group- and individual-based social hierarchies are relevant in the bullying dynamic. The bully's goal of gaining power and status is an individual objective that requires the ability to establish an individual-based social hierarchy. However, the realization of this goal depends upon the peer group accepting and valuing the bullying behavior (Salmivalli, 2010) as well as forming a group that creates a group-based social hierarchy. These hierarchies are then maintained through ongoing bullying and humiliation of victims.

The highest levels of aggression are often exhibited during group formation when a social hierarchy is forming, with aggression decreasing after the hierarchy has been formed (Long & Pellegrini, 2003). During the formation process, when social dominance is not yet established, it is likely that youth might use bullying as a way of jockeying for a dominant social position. Indeed, bullying peaks in sixth grade and then decreases throughout middle and high school (Guerin & Hennessy, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Peskin, Tortolero, & Markham, 2006). The higher rates of bullying during the outset of middle school might serve to establish a social pecking order as youth transition to a new school setting and social context. Although rates decrease thereafter, bullying continues at lower levels to maintain the social hierarchy.

An example of the way bullying can be used to establish social dominance can be found in relational bullying among girls. Relational bullying and relational aggression are closely related but distinct constructs, primarily distinguished by whether the behavior is repeated. Relational bullying is repetitive and ongoing, whereas relational aggression is limited to a few isolated acts. Relational bullying and aggression are intended to harm the victims' reputation and social relationships, and include actions such as rumor spreading, excluding, ignoring, and posting embarrassing images of the victim via physical or electronic means (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014). These forms of relational aggression are less obvious and obtrusive than physical aggression, which makes them effective because they often goes undetected by adults (Mishna, 2012). Further, the lack of overt

aggression makes relational aggression especially appealing to girls and consequently some studies have found that girls are more likely than boys to be relationally aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

During adolescence, relationships are the focal point of many girls' lives (Simmons, 2002). Because these social relationships are in constant flux (Simmons, 2002), girls experience continuous competition to obtain social dominance, which is measured by popularity and social status. Social dominance is often established through relational bullying used to create alliances among some girls while turning girls against each other. "Indeed, popularity itself is in large part defined by the ability of one girl to turn her friends against someone else...Alliance building is a sign of peer affirmation, an unspoken contract that means...a girl will not be abandoned" (Simmons, 2002, p. 82). The desire for dominance is a catalyst for bullying behavior. Strategies used by girl bullies to obtain dominance and relegate others to a lower social status include rumor spreading, gossiping, excluding, and ignoring. These tactics are often successful. Research with seventh and ninth grade girls showed relational aggression was associated with increased perceived popularity over time (Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004). That is, the more a girl engaged in relational aggression, the more likely her classmates were to perceive her as having power. An increased perception or "reputation" of power among the group can lead to greater popularity for the bully.

Both individual- and group-based social hierarchies form because of relational aggression. Charismatic girls who are adept at manipulating others are more likely to successfully use strategies of relational aggression to garner respect, popularity, and social status for themselves. If other girls follow the perpetrator and form a group or clique, a group-based social hierarchy forms because the group shares social dominance and the members of this group would be accorded social power. If individuals join a group to affiliate with the group's social status, they are often pressured to take on characteristics of that group, promoting homogeneity. If bullying or relational aggression is a tool of that group, new members would likely become quickly socialized to the use of bullying tactics. Indeed, after this socialization process, a group member may be reluctant to leave the group because leaving may dramatically heighten the risk of becoming the group's next victim.

The Theory of Humiliation: Why Being Dominated is Painful and Leads to Negative Victim Outcomes

Humiliation is "excessive overt derogation" that occurs when a more powerful individual publically reveals the inadequacies of a weaker victim, who feels the treatment is

unjustified (Jackson, 1999, p. 2). The concept of humiliation is distinct from shame. An individual can shame him or herself, whereas humiliation requires action from an outside agent who engenders feelings of powerlessness in the victim (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Klein, 1991). Further, shame results in an internal feeling of inadequacy and embarrassment, whereas humiliation often causes anger towards the perpetrator and the desire for retaliation (Jackson, 1999). Conversely, the rage generated by humiliation can also be turned inwards in the form of depression (Lindner, 2007). These emotional reactions are quite common for victims after bullying incidents.

Humiliation and Bullying Victimization

The effects of humiliation are far reaching and impact the humiliated individual as well as the surrounding community or society, and therefore, humiliation is considered a significant impediment to positive human development. From harmony on preschool playgrounds to global peace, experiences of humiliation disrupt social cohesion (Lindner, 2003). Bullying victimization is a form of humiliation (Meltzer, Vostanis, Ford, Bebbington, & Dennis, 2011; Simmons, 2002) given that bullying usually occurs publically, involves the subjugation of a less powerful victim, and effects the entire school community by limiting social cohesion. Lindner's (2001a, 2006) theory of humiliation addresses humiliation on a global scale (e.g., feelings of humiliation among the German people after World War I set the stage for Hitler's rise to power). However, this theory can also be applied to school bullying to illuminate the role humiliation plays in the outcomes of victims and bully/victims, as well as to illustrate how bullying prevents the formation of a peaceful and cohesive school environment. The interpersonal nature of humiliation is vital to understanding and applying Lindner's theory. Klein (1991) coined the term *humiliation dynamic* to highlight the fact that although humiliation is an intensely personal feeling, humiliation is generated from social interactions and relationship dynamics such as bullying.

Humiliation involves "putting down and holding down" (Lindner, 2006, p. xi) and has such intense power that it is considered "the nuclear bomb of the emotions" (Lindner, 2006, p. 3). With the emergence of human rights and the recognition that all persons are deserving of dignity, humiliating another person became morally and ethically wrong (Lindner, 2001b). The basis for Lindner's theory is the notion that all humans' desire and deserve recognition and respect and humiliation violates this fundamental human right, resulting in eroded interpersonal relationships and disrupted social cohesion (Lindner, 2007).

The humiliation dynamic involves three roles: humiliator (i.e., person who inflicts humiliation), victim (i.e.,

person who experiences humiliation), and witness (i.e., person or persons who observe and verify that humiliation is occurring; Klein, 1991). Bullies physically, verbally, or relationally humiliate their victims, relegating their victims to a lower social status in an effort to establish power. Building on the work of Smith (2001), Lindner (2006, 2003) posited humiliation had four forms:

Conquest Humiliation— an individual uses conquest humiliation to force a former equal into a subordinate position. Conquest humiliation is a precursor to bullying because this form of humiliation establishes the power differential inherent in the bullying dynamic. For example, if two adolescent girls of equal status are vying for the position of “queen bee” of a desired social group, one girl could use relational aggression (e.g., rumor spreading, exclusion) to humiliate her rival and turn other girls against the rival, thus relegating her rival to a lower social position and creating a power differential.

Reinforcement Humiliation is used to maintain the social hierarchy established by conquest humiliation. Following from the above example, the new queen bee would continue to spread rumors about and exclude her rival as a means of ongoing humiliation to maintain her rival’s subjugation.

Relegation Humiliation is used as a means of creating a larger power differential between the humilator and the victim. If the new queen bee wanted to ensure the complete social demise of her rival, she could use relegation humiliation to sabotage her rival’s new friendships by increasing the intensity and frequency of bullying; thus, making her rival appear socially undesirable and relegating her to an even lower social position.

Exclusion Humiliation is the most stringent form of humiliation and involves banishing victims altogether by exiling or killing them. In the realm of bullying, this form of humiliation would occur if the queen bee ensured that everyone in the class completely ignored and avoided her rival, perhaps until the rival left school or, in extreme situations, committed suicide.

The humiliation of being bullied violates the individual’s fundamental need for respect and recognition. Humiliation also undermines social standing, engendering the psychological pain of ostracism. Being bullied results in anger; this anger can be externalized as retaliation or internalized as depression. The outward expression of anger as retaliation can take the form of bullying, which fits with the description of the bully/victim as a person who is a victim of a bully, but also bullies others. In contrast, other victims internalize the humiliation and feel deep despair, which manifests as depression; this reaction to humiliation

explains why victims often have higher rates of depression compared with non-victimized youth (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Menesini et al., 2009).

Research has indicated that humiliation exacerbates interpersonal conflicts (Fitness, 2001) and results in strong, negative emotions. For example, individuals who reported they had been humiliated by their partner also reported feeling hatred towards their partner and tended to withdraw (Fitness & Fletcher, 1993). Qualitative interviews with 10 students and 10 teachers revealed that experiences of humiliation such as bullying resulted in substance use, attendance problems, dropping out of school, and suicidal thoughts (Frey & Fisher, 2008).

Given these strong reactions to humiliation, intense ongoing humiliation can be considered as a form of trauma (Lindner, 2001a). Recently, bullying victimization has been studied as a form of interpersonal trauma (D’Andrea, Ford, Stolbach, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk, 2012). Interpersonal traumas, such as bullying, erode victims’ abilities to form social and emotional attachments to others such as an inability to successfully attach to a peer group or to school (Popp & Peguero, 2012; Smokowski & Kopaz, 2005), further, bullying threatens the physical well-being of victims, who often report feeling afraid and helpless. Bullying victimization is a form of humiliation and interpersonal trauma that makes forming and sustaining relationships difficult for the victim.

The negative relationship effects of bullying are not isolated to victims. Bullying episodes and the humiliation engendered disrupt social cohesion in the school and classroom. Although the majority of youth are not directly involved in the bullying dynamic, witnessing the ongoing humiliation of a classmate erodes bystanders’ feelings of safety and security and leaves them constantly wondering “Will I be next?” The fear of becoming the next victim and suffering the same type of humiliation they have witnessed makes it unlikely that bystanders will intervene to help victims. Instead, youth often passively watch the bullying or support the bully. The desire to maintain power encourages bullies to continue bullying and the fear of being humiliated sustains bystanders’ complicit silence. Indeed, the fear of humiliation “...appears to be one of the most powerful motivators of individual and collective human behavior” (Klein, 1991, p. 96). The fear of becoming a victim creates an atmosphere of trepidation and mistrust that further erodes relationships and disrupts social cohesion.

Highly emotional and personally significant events, such as being bullied, tend to be remembered in great detail (van der Kolk, 1997). Traumatic events are often stored at a somatosensory level, that is, highly emotional, personal events are stored as visual images or sensations related to the trauma and those visual images persist over time (van

der Kolk, 1994). Indeed, "...recurrent observations about the nature of traumatic memories have given rise to the notion that traumatic memories may be encoded differently than memories for ordinary events..." (van der Kolk, 1997, p. 248). Moderate amounts of stress, such as that present in bullying encounters, actually facilitate memory (Siegel, 2012). This assertion has been supported by research suggesting that adults who were bullied during childhood continue to vividly remember the details of their victimization experiences years later (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Russell, 2010).

For example, a retrospective study using a sample of 60 adults (mean age 29.7 years) who were bullied as children due to their perceived sexual orientation, asked participants about their bullying victimization (Rivers, 2001). Questions included who bullied them, how they were bullied, where and when the bullying occurred, and who they told about the bullying. Participants also answered questions about the age at which they first knew they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Participants were re-interviewed 12–14 months later and were asked the same questions. The majority of the answers about being bullied at Time 1 were highly and significantly correlated with answers at Time 2. Specifically, participants consistently recalled the forms of bullying they endured as well as the specific location where the bullying occurred, indicating the vividness with which these humiliating memories were recalled. However, participants did not exhibit the same level of memory recall for subsequent events, including who the victim told about the bullying and at what age the person developed awareness of his or her sexual orientation. These later events were recalled with less consistency and were not significantly correlated between Time 1 and Time 2 (Rivers, 2001). These findings highlight that events that caused less humiliation were not recalled with as much vividness as the memories of events that caused high levels of humiliation, including being bullied. Further, adults who were victimized as children have an increased risk for depression and anxiety (Gladstone, Parker, & Malhi, 2006; Ttofi, Farrington, Losel, & Loeber, 2011), suggesting that memories of bullying are persistent and negatively influence victims' mental health in adulthood.

In summary, bullying victimization is a form of humiliation and can be considered an interpersonal trauma. Bullying is used to create a hierarchy of social status in which bullies reside on the top and victims are relegated to a lower social position. The presence of bullying in schools erodes social cohesion because bullying fuels a pervasive intimidating fear of becoming the next victim and of being publically humiliated. Viewing bullying victimization as a form of humiliation highlights why the memories of bullying victimization are persistent and can affect adult outcomes.

Organizational Culture Theory: How the Culture and Climate of School Impacts Bullying

Broadly defined, culture refers to shared values, beliefs, rituals, and customs (Deal & Kennedy, 1983). Although typically applied to ethnic or religious groups, the concept of culture also applies to organizations, and organizations have unique cultures that impact their success (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Indeed, the foundation of organizational culture theory is the notion that every organization has its own culture (Geertz, 1973). That is, organizational norms, beliefs, and behaviors impact how the organization functions and solves problems (Schein, 2010). The organizational culture in the context of a school is often referred to as the *school culture* or *school climate*.

School culture is a broader concept than school climate (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008) and refers to "[A school's] unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations...that seems to permeate everything..." (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 2). School climate is more specific and refers to the "quality and character" of a school and includes elements such as the level of social, emotional, and physical safety; the presence of respectful behavior; an emphasis on the importance of learning; and collaboration between students, families, and educators (National School Climate Center, 2014). School culture and climate significantly impact rates of youth involvement in risky behaviors in the school setting. For example, Klein, Cornell, and Konold (2012) found that school climate explained 66 % of the variance in youth risk behaviors (i.e., as measured by eight items from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System such as "got in a physical fight" or "felt hopeless"). Accordingly, school culture and climate are associated with other social problems such as bullying.

A positive school culture and climate denote a feeling of safety and the presence of support; teachers are aware of their students' needs, intervene in social disputes such as bullying, and encourage students to stand up for one another. Thus, a positive school climate is significantly associated with less bullying behavior (Lee & Song, 2012). It would follow that the reverse is also true: increased rates of bullying would be associated with a negative school climate. For example, if teachers dismiss students' complaints about bullying or degrade students in front of their peers, these students are likely to feel belittled, and might think it is acceptable to emulate the teachers' derogatory behavior by bullying classmates. Further, involvement in bullying negatively impacts students' perceptions of school climate. As compared with students not involved in the bullying dynamic, those students who were highly involved in bullying perceived school as less safe and adults as less willing to intervene on their behalf (Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013). The connection between school

culture and climate and bullying behaviors highlights why bullying interventions, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP; Violence Prevention Works, 2015), use a whole-school approach that focuses on changing the culture and climate of the school.

To impact bullying behavior, the entire school organization—students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents, and the community—must be committed to the anti-bullying mission. Further, the school organization must be committed to changing the existing organizational culture of a school in order to achieve the anti-bullying mission. For example, “OBPP is a whole-school, systems-change program” (Olweus et al., 2007, p. 3) that targets the school, classroom, individual, and community. “The goal of OBPP is to change the norms around bullying behavior and to restructure the school setting itself so that bullying is less likely to occur and be rewarded” (Olweus et al., 2007, p. xi). Fully embracing the extent of change that needs to occur for bullying interventions to be successful requires schools to be *learning organizations* that are defined by having “...a core set of conditions and processes that support the ability of an organization to value, acquire, and use information and tacit knowledge acquired from employees and stakeholders to successfully plan, implement, and evaluate strategies to achieve performance goals” (Bowen, Rose, & Ware, 2006).

Bullying behaviors are not only influenced by school culture, but their presence also influences school culture and climate. Efforts to change rates of bullying behaviors will not be effective without fundamental changes in the school culture. Changes of this magnitude are possible only when the school principal is willing to foster an open and collaborative approach to problem solving, which is a hallmark of a learning organization. Future research should examine whether the limited success of anti-bullying interventions implemented in U.S. schools to date (Evans, Fraser, & Cotter, 2014) is related to the lack of change in school culture, schools’ resistance to change, and school’s minimal commitment to becoming a learning organization.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Social workers both in schools and the community often work with youth involved in the bullying dynamic. Specifically, social workers might be asked to assess a bullying situation by identifying the bully and victim and then intervening to end the bullying. Social workers should use the theories and information presented in this article to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what might be motivating the bully’s behavior and how this behavior might impact the victim. Understanding the inherent scramble for social capital, power, and control over social networks is critically important so that social workers can

determine how, when, and where to intervene to have the greatest impact.

Social capital development is about access to information, resources, relationships, and roles. Social workers can help guide healthy social network formation by actively facilitating group formation, especially during early group development (i.e., at the beginning of middle school or first semester of ninth grade). Structured group activities can greatly facilitate positive social network formation, rather than allowing leaderless jockeying of group members for control. Diverse subgroups of students should be brought together to learn about each other and broaden social group development. This is especially helpful for introverted students who tend to withdraw, raising their risk for isolation and victimization. Indeed, social workers can help these students find valued roles to play in social groups (i.e., the marching band, the school newspaper), encouraging them toward active participation rather than marginalization.

Dominance theory helps frame interaction in terms of power, control, and subjugation. As professionals, social workers are commonly socialized to see power inequities; however, disparities are often seen in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation. While respecting the importance of these categories, social workers handling bullying situations also must consider differences in power due to physical features, interpersonal skills, social disability, and other characteristics that set one child apart from other children. Children may become targets for victimization due to being too short, too tall, too heavy, too skinny, too smart, not smart enough, and for many other attributes. Social workers should identify students who are quiet, self-conscious, isolated, and on the margins of social groups. These victims and potential victims should be brought into welcoming social groups, linked to higher functioning children or adult mentors to nurture friendships, and given the opportunity to play some type of role in the school community to develop pride in their social contribution. In short, social workers should seek out children on the margins of the social ecology and find ways for them to participate.

Bullies often desire power and are willing to use anti-social strategies, such as humiliation, to obtain their goal. Recognizing this underlying need, social workers can help bullies find less destructive, prosocial ways in which to gain a feeling of power and confidence. Like victims, bullies may feel that they are on the margins of prosocial peer groups; however, they cope by creating antisocial subgroups of their own, generating “anti-social” capital rather than positive social capital. Recognizing this, social workers can help bullies gain respect and control in positive ways through access to prosocial roles and in cultivating friendships that are not based on power and control.

Just as schools have adopted Zero Tolerance policies on bullying, humiliation experiences should be dealt with quickly and with clear consequences. Perpetrators should be disciplined; victims coping with public humiliation should be offered trauma-informed treatment. Given that humiliation experiences have serious and far-reaching impacts on the emotional life of the child, social workers should help the child express his or her feelings and continue to engage with other students. It is unhealthy for the victim to withdraw from social participation and internalize the humiliation experience.

Youth might not be aware of the mechanisms underlying the bullying dynamic that this article discusses and educating youth about the causes and consequences of bullying might help them understand their experiences with bullying. Helping victims verbalize their feelings of humiliation and supporting them in acquiring self-confidence is clearly a vital element of enabling victims to heal from bullying and might help combat the onset of depression and anxiety. Finally, social workers must remember that bullying affects the entire school community. While intervening in and attempting to change individual bullying dynamics is important, the whole climate and culture of the school must be altered in order to totally extinguish bullying.

Conclusion

The complexities of the bullying dynamic can be best understood through the lenses of various theories that help elucidate the nuances of this social process. Social capital theory sheds light on the bullying dynamic as bullies often use bullying as a means of obtaining and protecting social capital, which fuels their power and gives them the resources to continue bullying and acquiring additional social capital. In contrast, victims lack social capital, making it almost impossible for them to shed their victim status. The desire for dominance is another motivating factor for bullies and bullying is used as a means to acquire both group and individual social dominance. A serious consequence of this social domination is the humiliation of victims, which results in negative victim outcomes such as depression, anger, and enduring memories of the bullying events. Finally, although school bullying occurs between small groups of students, its presence negatively impacts the school culture and climate, highlighting the need for whole school interventions. Using social capital theory, dominance theory, the theory of humiliation, and organizational culture theory to examine bullying and its consequences provides a new and innovative way of understanding the bullying dynamic and sheds light onto how social work practitioners can work with youth involved in the bullying dynamic.

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