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Reversing Demoralization Linked to School Bullying

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ABSTRACT

There have been 417 gun violence in schools since Columbine. In these shootings, more than 383,000 students were killed. At the time of the event, most offenders of school mass shootings were targets of school bullying, experiencing a mental health crisis, and a history of depression. Effective interventions and support that could help prevent or reduce school bullying incidents require understanding the process of demoralization and empowering social change. This paper is part of an original constructivist grounded theory study on democratic social change in America explored through a post hoc polytheoretical framework comprised of Foucauldian, Bourdieuan, and Marxist power. It aims to answer the question: In which areas would the democratic social change grounded theory resonate the most? Of significance was the finding of a novel framework from which to understand and assess how students unknowingly use power strategies that could lead to the demoralization of targets of bullying who lack adequate coping skills and meaningful support and an empowering social change process that could counter demoralization and lead to security. More research is needed on bully-involved demoralization and specific interventions that lead to positive and sustainable social change.

Keywords: CBT; Disempowerment process; Entrapment; Pathway to hope; Positive behavior intervention and support; Restoring human dignity; Intervention framework; Ostracism; Perceptions of justice; School mass shooting; Sustainable social change process.

1. Introduction

> Demoralization appears to be a major public health problem ... because subjective incompetence appears to influence the course and worsen the prognosis of both nonpsychiatric and psychiatric disorders.
>
> —John de Figueiredo, 2004

Once a normalized behavior,[1] bullying has evolved into a problem that some students have sought to resolve with substance use, dropping out, suicide, or mass shootings.[2,3] There have been 417 gun violence in schools since Columbine. In these shootings, more than 383,000 students have been killed.[4] Most offenders of mass shootings were targets of persistent bullying by peers.[3] While 69% of shooters had observable mental health symptoms before their attack,[3] 92% to 100% of mass shooters were depressed at the time of the shooting,[5] 57% had behavioral symptomology, and 20% had neurological/developmental symptoms.[3] Neurological/Developmental symptoms include specific learning disabilities, cognitive deficits, developmental delays, delayed language acquisition, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).[3] Moreover, there is a link between demoralization and mental health disorders.[6] Demoralization is a "constant experience of inability to cope, with feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, meaninglessness, a subjective sense of incompetence, and low self-esteem" (p. 2).[7] It may precede depression and is often caused by major trauma (e.g., cancer).[7]

Consistent with the United States Secret Service report of 2019, [3] students afflicted with learning disabilities, conduct problems, and severe emotional disturbances are more likely to get bullied.[8] They are also more likely to face future problems that include academic failures, risk-taking behavior, substance abuse, delinquency, and poor quality of life. [2,9-11] "There is a need for effective treatments and support for [bullied] youth with social, emotional, and behavioural problems."[12] To address the problem of bullying, teachers must leverage an average of 14

interventions at one time, which is too many to implement effectively.[2] The three most common bullying interventions are social support, social skills, and school-based programs.[13]

Nevertheless, an excessive response to bullying by some continues, with the most recent tragedy at Apalachee High School in Georgia.[14] The pubescent shooter, C. Gray, was bullied and was also experiencing a mental health crisis at the time of the incident.[15] Gray was awaiting residential placement when he went on the rampage.[16] He was diagnosed with major depression, anxiety disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.[15] Effective school interventions and support that could reduce or prevent school mass shooting incidents require understanding the empowerment and disempowerment processes and how school bullying could lead to demoralization.

This paper aims to apply Forde's[17] democratic social change and demoralization processes to school bullying to provide educators with an understanding of negative and positive transformation. As a result of this understanding, teachers can disrupt the demoralization process and implement interventions framed within an empowering paradigm. Schools can implement interventions that align with the six democratic social change processes to stifle demoralization. Considering interventions the student being bullied finds have worked in the past or would likely be the most effective intervention.[18] The aim of sharing the framework is to educate teachers and children's advocates on a bullying process that may lead to demoralization and how to breach the process by empowering students with knowledge, fairness, and respect for human dignity and adopt an ecological approach to bullying that gives students the hope that security is possible.

1.1. Study Objective

The study aims to introduce two frameworks of power and transformation: one is comprised of power strategies leveraged by students who seek to demoralize targets of bullying through persistent harassment. The other framework assists school personnel with framing empowering interventions that lead to breaching the demoralization process.

2. Literature Review

Schools are places where slight differences stand out to adults and children who often oppose diversity. This becomes fertile soil for an in-group versus out-group mentality and power imbalance.[19] To someone who bullies, the source of intolerance to diversity may be something as insignificant as shoe color or clothes worn by the person being bullied.[19] Bullying creates a sense of unfairness, leading to anger, hostility, depression, and low self-worth.[19,20] Bullying is "a long-standing negative behavior that is conducted by a group or an individual and is directed against a person who is not able to defend him- or herself" (p. 332).[21] Close to 20% of students between the ages of 12 and 18 have been bullied. The figure is higher in rural areas.[22]

Bullying is not restricted to learner-on-learner bullying. Instructor-on-learner bullying also exists.[23,24] Twemlow et al.[24] found that "teachers who bully students may have some role in the etiology of behavioral problems in schoolchildren" (p. 2387).[24] Instructor-on-learner bullying can cause irreparable harm to students.[23] While the strategies used by someone who bullies are the same, their tactics differ. Teachers who bully, abuse their power, ridicule, punish, manipulate, and ignore student requests, a tactic that plays a role in mattering.[1,25-28]

Bullying in academic settings is not limited to primary and secondary school settings. Higher education students also experience bullying from peers and instructors.[1,29] Higher education instructor bullying tactics are like those of lower-grade teachers. They destabilize (ordering work below or above competency level, withhold information that impacts performance, shift goalpost,[30] overwork student assistant, threaten the student's professional status (through excessive monitoring), isolate (professional and social exclusion by friends,[18] intimidate with disciplinary procedures, make false allegations, ignore students, publicly humiliate, take credit for student's ideas and work, and other bullying tactics.[29] The impact of bullying on postgraduate students, like younger learners, includes psychological distress (anxiety, suicidal behavior),[1] depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, fear of ramifications or increased bullying, hopelessness, loss of career opportunities, decreased confidence, requesting leave of absence, or abandoning the program.[29]

By contrast, younger students are more likely to seek teacher support or tell someone than older students.[29] Students with appropriate or adequate social or coping skills are less likely to engage in aggressive or violent behaviors.[31,32] Here, coping skills include the person being bullied being able to match wits with students who engage in bullying behavior. While arranging a "Yo' Momma" joke competition may not be the best way to resolve bullying, some students use jokes as a means of resolving their bullying problem. Students with a sound support system (teacher, guidance counselor, therapist, principal, parents, and others are less prone to feel the impact of bullying than students without support systems.[1,32-35] Like adult targets of workplace bullying, adolescent targets of bullying suffer from anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation,[19,32,36] self-mutilation, low self-esteem, loneliness, suicide,[35] conduct problems,[1,36] and trust and health issues.[19] Younger learners working towards acquiring coping skills or social change will require more assistance from natural mentors than older students due to differences in developmental level,[18] social and coping skills, and the available support level. These differences determine the intervention, the level of support needed, and the impact bullying can have on students. Although adult students also experience bullying, the focus of this study, however, will be primarily on children and adolescents.

2.1. Demoralization

The conceptualization of demoralization has evolved throughout the years. In the 1960s, Victor Frankl described demoralization in A Man's Search for Meaning as "suffering without meaning;" Gruenberg described it as social breakdown among the mentally ill" (p. 1),[37] and Schmale and Engel clinically profiled demoralization as the "giving-up complex" (p. 139).[38] This is because specific phrases emerged during clinical interviews for Schmale and Engel's that expressed feelings of helplessness and hopelessness: "it is too much," "it is no use," "I cannot take it anymore" (p. 139).[40] The "perception of diminished competence and control in one's own functioning […] diminished hope and confidence in projecting oneself into the future" (p. 139)[40] […] unable to cope with some pressing problems … demoralized or discouraged because [they] are not adequately supported by friends and/or relatives" (p. 140][40] are other characteristics associated with "giving-up complex" (p. 139).[40] Lazarus and Folkman's coping model "brought about fresh scholarship that has focused on demoralization" (p. 1).[37]

A systematic review of 188 studies found demoralization is a "psychological state common in clinical and non-clinical settings."[40] Demoralization is prevalent among the "medically and mentally ill, refugees, the

unemployed, and drug and alcohol populations" (p. 1),[37] yet there are few studies on the demoralization outside of the areas of psycho-oncology, psychosomatics, palliative care, and neurobiology.[7,37,38] The "exploration of demoralization in children and adolescents has been neglected" (p. 144).[38] Perhaps the dearth of research is related to the American Psychological Association's failure to recognize demoralization as a psychiatric diagnosis.[37] By contrast, the International Classification for Diseases (ICD-11) defines demoralization as a "loss of confidence in one's ability to cope, with associated feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and discouragement" (p. 1).[37] Similar to the ICD's definition is Kissane's[37] definition of demoralization: "a state of poor coping characterized by the phenomena of low morale, hopelessness, entrapment, and loss of meaning and purpose in life" (p. 1).[37] Demoralization is typically transient but can be persistent.[7,40] There are gaps in the literature exploring demoralization among children and adolescent targets of bullying and demoralization interventions for students being bullied. Addressing these gaps could "prevent unnecessary and highly iatrogenic use of antidepressants" (p. 144)[38] that could lead to serotonin syndrome, tardive dyskinesia, sudden death, overly elevated mood, drug dependence, or other serious issues.

2.2. Clinical Evaluation

There is considerable overlap between demoralization and psychiatric disorders, making it difficult for educators to determine if the characteristics they are evidencing are demoralization or related to a mental health diagnosis.[37,38] Research supports the argument that demoralization is a "distinct clinical syndrome that is not necessarily related to the presence of a psychiatric disorder" (p. 142).[38] Clinical evaluations of demoralization include neurobiological mapping using fMRI — which revealed that positive emotional reappraisal that creates meaning and hope is mediated" by "pathways termed the "hope system" (p. 1),[37] Diagnostic Criteria for Psychosomatic Research Semi-Structured Interview (DCPR-SSI) —"found to display excellent inter-rater reliability" (p. 141),[38] Demoralization Scale,[41] and Demoralization Interview, which study shows have good diagnostic sensitivity.[6] Fava and Guidi[38] found that a good clinical assessment of demoralization considers the role of psychological stress. This is because demoralized individuals struggle to cope with "fluctuating or heightened neural and systemic physiologic responses" to stress that exceeds their coping resources (p. 141).[38] However, these clinical evaluation instruments are mostly used with medically ill patients and have not been validated for use with children and adolescents, despite the finding that "demoralization was found to be common particularly when superimposed on developmental reading disorder [a factor with strong relationship with incarceration;[42] and enuresis" (p. 144).[38]

2.3. Demoralization Interventions

Adult intervention for demoralization is meaning-centered therapies that are "effective in restoring hope, meaning, and morale, providing a coherent life story, and highlighting supportive relationships and roles" (p. 2),[38] family therapy that enhances relationships and strengthens meaning, existential psychotherapy,[38] and dignity therapy to help palliative patients gain a sense of peace.[43] There is a lack of research on interventions directed toward helping demoralized targets of bullying. However, it is suggested that Forde's[17] empowering social change can be leveraged to frame interventions that could disrupt and reverse demoralization, considering the characterization of demoralization in the literature:

- Inability to cope with pressing problems
- Perceptions of justice[44]
- Feelings of worthlessness; feelings of loss of dignity[45]
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Impaired social relationships, feeling alone
- Feelings of insecurity about the future
- Feelings of entrapment

3. Methods

Charmaz's[46] constructivist grounded theory was employed in an original democratic social change study by Forde.[17] Glaser and Strauss[47] pioneered grounded theory methodology to develop theories grounded in substantive data found in theoretical samples, selected purposive samples that are believed to lead to theory construction (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007),[48] to explain personal and social experiences. There are three main typologies of grounded theory methodology: classical, pragmatic, and constructivist. The principles are abstraction, abductive reasoning, theoretical sampling, compare-and-contrast data analysis method, theoretical sensitivity, and theory construction.[47,48] Controversies exist about the timing of the literature review, the introduction of the theoretical framework, levels of coding,[48] whether the theory resides in the content or the researcher constructs the theory,[47,48] whether coding is inductive or deductive,[49] and which criteria for rigor to use.[50] Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory was less restrictive than Glaser and Strauss's[47] classical grounded theory. For the democratic social change theory, the literature review was delayed, and the theoretical framework was introduced post-hoc.[17]

The theoretical sample comprised the United States founding documents: The Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the United States Constitution, and 14 essays from the Federalist Papers—Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 14, 22, 38, 42, 43, 51, 54, and 83 (see Figure 1).[17] The documents were explored for democracy and social change as they underwent grounded theory's constant compare-and-contrast method using multiple data analysis techniques: perspective-taking, dramaturgical and situational analysis, systems and holistic thinking, and deconstruction.[17]

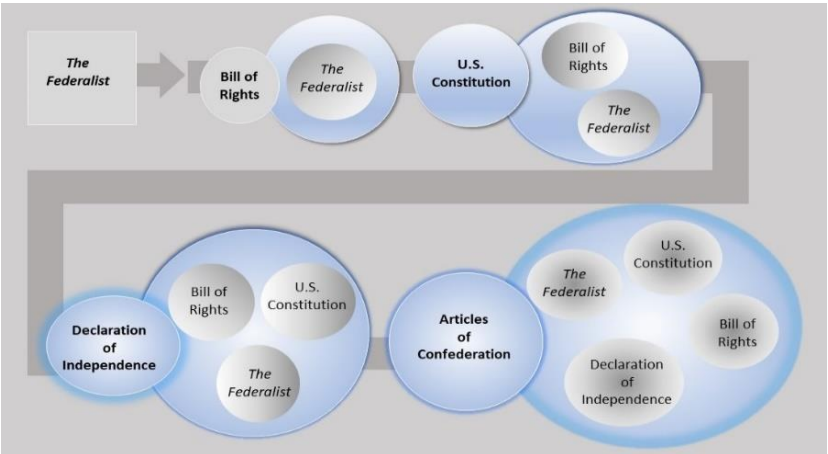

Figure 1. Theoretical Sampling Process

Perspective-taking is putting oneself in the place of another to attempt to see and understand a phenomenon as they do.[51] Dramaturgical analysis explores how individuals present themselves to others.[52] Situational analysis explores and analyzes situations in relationships, human and nonhuman interaction, and from different positions or perspectives.[53] Systems thinking analyzes parts, processes, and their relationship to the whole.[54] Holistic thinking contrasts with systems thinking in that the phenomenon becomes the center of attention.[55] Deconstruction is stripping away layers of meaning until securing the underlying assumptions of power.[56]

Commensurate with grounded theory methodology, democracy emerged from the substantive content as empowerment after anti-democratic actions that seemed to disempower and stifle democracy. Empowerment and disempowerment were then used as sensitizing concepts that give a "general sense of what is relevant" (p. 148).[57] Aristotle's[58] first principles approach to abstraction was implemented during coding. As one could expect using the compare-and-contrast data analysis method, two categories emerged through which transformation can occur: an empowering social change process and a demoralization process.[17] Abductive reasoning produced the abductive preference (the preferred explanation that best addresses the main research question) and several abductive discoveries (alternative explanations using the theoretical codes).

After the construction of the democratic social change theory, a key question related to the application of the grounded theory emerged: In which areas would the democratic social change grounded theory resonate the most? Answering the questions added rigor and expanded the application of the grounded theory to other domains of knowledge. Copious memos, constant compare and contrast of the relationship and strategies used by colonists and Great Britain, and abductive reasoning facilitated applying the democratic social change grounded theory framework to national security, business planning, marketing, intimate partner violence, workplace violence, and school bullying.[17] The social change processes resonated with professionals who work in these fields.[17] Moreover, the literature review supports the framework as one that could help others understand disempowerment strategies that could lead to demoralization and empowerment strategies that could lead to social change. The polytheoretical framework of power added rigor in the form of theoretical triangulation and supported the empowering social change process at multiple levels of analysis.

4. Theoretical Framework

Forde[17] sought to contribute new democratic values to the literature. Rather than more democratic values emerging from within the nation's founding documents, 12 concepts emerged using Aristotle's first principles approach during data analysis: six democratic principles—knowledge, fairness, human dignity, hope, unity, security—and six anti-democratic strategies —misinformation, social distinctions, dehumanization, subjugation, nativism, and fear. The principles of democracy advanced six democratic principles undergirded by American democratic values, and those in the UN Declaration of Human Rights ground the framework.[17,59,60] They have a higher level of abstraction than traditional democratic values: justice, equality, due process, freedom, and participation, for example. The empowering process proposes a framework to understand social change at four levels of analysis.[17] The concepts are interrelated, so one tactic can support multiple demoralization strategies. For example, depending on the epithet, name-calling can misinform, dehumanize, instill fear, support nativism, recognize social

distinctions, and subjugate. The framework is believed to comprise strategies leveraged to achieve America's most significant attempt at social change, the Revolutionary War.[17,63] By contrast, six processes were identified in the disempowering process from political strategies that colonists and Great Britain leveraged before the nation's founding. The better-known disempowering tactics referred to as a "train of abuses and usurpations" are found in the Declaration of Independence.

Although the democratic social change framework is based on newly emerged democratic principles in the American founding documents, the concepts are part of the centuries-old social change process. The principles are undergirded by democratic values discussed by "Allen (2014), Benet (2006), Butts (1980, 1988), Connolly (2010), Dahl (2001), De Tocqueville (1839/2002), Giridharadas (2018), Kendi (2016), Mencken (1926; p. 87),[17] and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.'[17,59] Notwithstanding, these authors did not discuss the newly discovered democratic principles embedded into America's founding documents. Both processes empower those who leverage the strategies. In this framework, the preferred social change strategy to engage against oppressed people is democratic and empowering because it comprises knowledge, fairness, human dignity, hope, unity, and security.[17] The disempowerment process, which attempts to demoralize through domination, leverages misinformation, social distinctions, dehumanization, subjugation, nativism (tribalism), and fear to exercise a dark use of power.[17] When leveraged by politicians, these strategies require judicious use of wisdom.

4.1. Social Change Process and Empowerment

Empowerment has diverse definitions; one definition considers empowerment "an interactive process through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them to take action to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives and communities in which they live" (p. 3).[62] In this framework, empowerment starts with any of the "various species of knowledge" (p. 123),[62] and is oriented towards one or more types of security, defined as mental, physical, financial, emotional, spiritual, or psychological well-being. Knowledge permeates the framework since the processes rely on types of knowing to move and work toward security.[17] The second process towards democratic social change calls for the conscientization of fairness, a process Forde dedicated the most time discussing through the equity theory lens.[63] Conscientization of their political position in society must be awakened (see Figure 2).[64]

Figure 2. Social Change Process

The individual evaluates their situation and questions whether they are treated fairly as they aim to protect their human dignity.[17,61] Fairness is a basic sense of equality and proportionality relating to the person, situation, or event (e.g., reading and testing accommodations for slow readers or those easily distracted). While asserting or attempting to preserve respect for their human dignity, the person engages in comparative analysis between them and the oppressive other,[17,61] leading them to understand that they are not less than their oppressors. Human dignity is more

than self-respect; it is the internalization and integration of respect for others as human beings and those things that affect the quality of human life (e.g., environment and war). Hope relies on a viable pathway and agency to achieve goal[65] of security, often referred to as well-being ("national security, physical, psychological, financial, environmental, social, spiritual, and political security;" p. 158).[17] Hope can be contagious and can be internalized and integrated.[17] Hopeful individuals are courageous and often include others in attaining their goals. This phenomenon is evident in intimate partner violence. Untrusting targets are fearful of enlisting the support of others, and as a result, they prolong achieving security,[17,61] the last phase of the democratic social change process. The process is iterative, where the individual continues to be vigilant about new threats and barriers to security.[17]

4.2. From Disempowerment to Demoralization: The Process

Disempowerment strategies can be physical or psychological. They rely on knowledge of people, time, and events. Disempowerment is creating a state or feeling of powerlessness. Powerlessness is the "oppressive control exercised by systems and other people" (p. 2).[62] It could lead to "an internalized belief that change cannot occur, a belief which results in apathy and an unwillingness of the person to struggle for more control and influence" (p. 2).[62] Disempowerment strategies were woven into the Declaration of Independence[66] in the "long train of abuses and usurpations." Great Britain primarily leveraged them against colonists. In a show of power, the American Founders leveraged their brand of disempowerment to gain an advantage over the king. Dehumanization tactics included calling the king a monster and tyrant.[17] They made the king of equal status with the memorable words: "All men are created equal [...] endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable rights."[66] The only document without definitive disempowering strategies is the Bill of Rights.[17] However, trial by jury has had negative consequences that have led to the disempowerment of minorities, not because of the idea of a trial by jury, but because of the remnant of systematic discrimination against working-class Americans. Even so, it protects against a despot government.[17]

Demoralization is a "self-perceived incapacity to deal effectively with a specific stressful situation" and is "a combination of distress and subjective incompetence" (p. 308).[67] It is characterized by helplessness, hopelessness, resignation,[68] and loss of purpose and meaning in life.[69,70] Demoralization is linked to major depression, anxiety disorders, adjustment disorder, irritability, alexithymia (emotional numbness), type A behaviors, and grief.[68,69,71] Moreover, demoralized individuals are more likely to become confrontational and angry;[68,71] suffer from attachment disorders, have conduct problems, retreat from society, and commit suicide.[68,69,72] The demoralization process starts with nativism (see Figure 3).[17]

Figure 3. Demoralization Process

In the context of the original study, nativism is "an inherent tendency towards group-think" (p. 443)[73] and "loyalty and adherence to tribal ways of doing things" (e.g., nationalism; p. 442).[73] It "refers to obnoxious modes of

behavior" among a multicultural environment "that threatens and endangers normal coexistence" (p. 444)[73] because it is grounded by a culture of exclusion that espouses the us vs. them mentality.[17]

Nativists embrace the idea of in-group superiority, with the in-group's behaviors reflecting their beliefs and attitudes towards the out-group. The out-group is dehumanized through exclusion, stratification, fear, stereotypes, humiliation, and isolation. In other words, they are considered and treated as different and irrelevant. If the person being bullied has no support system or lacks intrinsic motivation, they are likely to become demoralized. Nativism "may transcend but may also include race, status, religion, sex, and nationality, depending on context" (p. 234).[17] Nativism and social distinctions are separate processes that use a unite–and–rule strategy whereby the whole is fractured in order to dissolve power.

Unlike nativism, which is framed from the perspective of the values of a subculture, social distinctions involve socially accepted doxa (unexamined assumptions, beliefs, and opinions accepted as a natural order of things; p. 204).[17,74] Historically, society has tacitly approved and treated certain classes of people as less important than others (e.g., paupers, vagabonds, fugitives from justice.[75] Social distinctions passively divide people into classes, with those higher on the class hierarchy being perceived as being qualitatively better and meriting better treatment than people on the lower strata.

This demoralization process is also founded on various types of knowledge. It leverages misinformation as its dominant approach. Oppressive power uses misinformation to divide, instill fear, dehumanize, and subjugate. Power is most evident in those who determine which strategy to leverage, when, and how. Fear is used to control by stopping or activating behavior. It is one of the most easily recognizable control strategies for people seeking power. It is used by parents, spouses, teachers, employers, media, and politicians. Notwithstanding, students, employees, and others can also leverage fear as a power strategy.

Dehumanization can take many forms, including the strategies in this framework. Dehumanization is any tactic that makes the target feel guilt, shame, or a combination. It reduces the individual's worth as a human being to that of an animal or object. It can lead to the control of the mind and spirit. Dehumanization tactics can be symbolic or physical. They can be rumors, name-calling, physical violence, or as subtle as silence. Subjugation is control of the mind, body, spirit, or a combination.

The objective of subjugation is psychological capitulation and demoralization, which often provokes one or more responses from demoralized individuals: retreat[76] (e.g., substance abuse), suicide, or resistance[76] (e.g., colonists during the Revolutionary War, and school mass shooters). Note that subjugation and disempowerment are not synonymous with demoralization, but they could lead to demoralization.

5. Application of Social Change Framework to Bullying

Forde's[17] democratic social change framework will be applied to school bullying, starting with the disempowerment process as the vehicle that triggers social change. Because the framework comprises highly abstract concepts, it is generalizable to other fields or substantive areas.[77] However, when the level of abstraction is lowered and aligned with terms used in the area where the framework will be applied (e.g., marketing), [78] in this case, school bullying, the process becomes intuitive (see Figure 4).

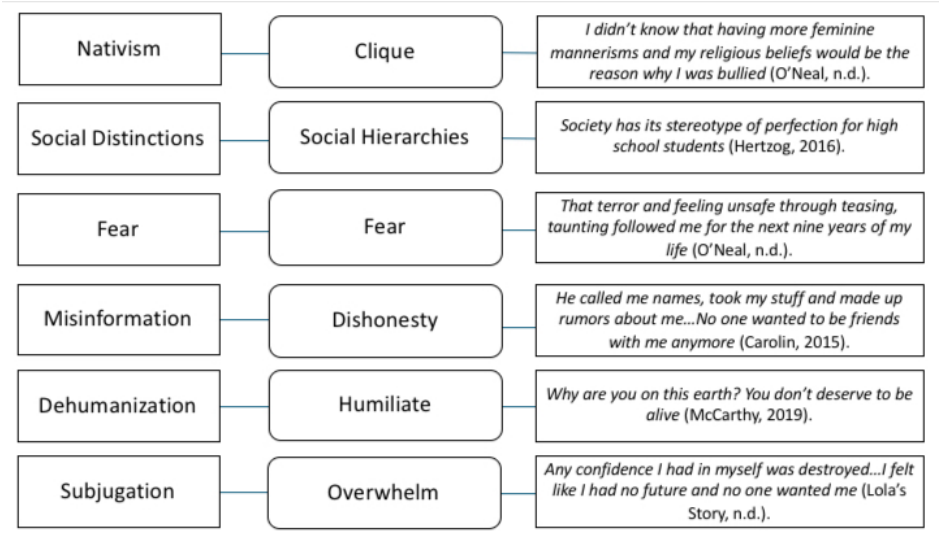

Figure 4. Area-Specific Terms and Examples[79-83]

5.1. The Demoralization Process

> Kids who bully have an air of superiority that is often a mask to cover up deep hurt and a feeling of inadequacy. They rationalize that their supposed superiority entitles them to hurt someone they hold in contempt, when in reality it is an excuse to put someone down so they can feel 'up.'
>
> —Coloroso, 2008

Demoralizing strategies disrupt learners, class, and the school community. Teachers must remain calm but vigilant for students who leverage or are targets of demoralizing strategies. Striving towards a positive, fair, and safe environment where every student is respected and required to respect their teachers and peers are valued interventions. In the field of education, disempowerment takes many forms: humiliation, shaming, ignoring, feigning disinterest, and ridicule tactics (dehumanization),[19,84] peer exclusion, isolation, clique formation centered around level of intelligence or sports aptitude (nativism), fractioning by class, race, ethnicity, religion, ability/disability (social distinctions), punishment, threats, coercion, verbal and physical violence (fear), and rumors (misinformation).[19]

Gourneau[85] believes the "essential ingredient all bullies look for in their target is vulnerability— 'some indication that the bully can abuse this child without retaliation'" (p. 120).[85] Traits often associated with lack of retaliation include "physical weakness, small stature, shyness, low self-esteem or lack of confidence, unwillingness to respond aggressively to aggressive behavior, anxious or fearful response to bullying, poor self-control" or social skills deficits, and personal possessions the bully might want (p. 120).[85] Risk factors that lead to a student being bullied: family structure, age, ethnicity, prior bullying perpetration, prior bullying victimization, family income, religious values and affiliation, unsafe neighborhoods, adverse school climate, feelings towards school, and school organizational characteristics are often factors shared with persons who bully (p. 5).[86]

5.1.1. Nativism/Clique

In the educational setting, nativism can take the form of cliques, gangs, or structured groups. Nativism is centered around shared values, attitudes, and beliefs and often fuels a sense of entitlement and superiority in its group

members. Moreover, they exclude those who are not part of the in-group. Exclusion is used to ostracize and draw a boundary between the in-group and the out-group. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lines were drawn around students who supported or did not support mask-wearing. Lines of exclusion can be based on the type of lunchbox a student has or does not have, grade level, ability, conception of normality, activity groups (e.g., debate, type of sports, exceptional education, and band), size, weight, sex, age, and membership in a protected status. It can also include or exclude people who bully and are targets of bullying. Racial tribalism can be understood by the 2007 Jena 6 story in Louisiana. The Jena 6 starts with symbolic violence that signals nativism and dehumanization on a school playground: the placement of a noose on a tree. While the Jena 6 story contains tactics that support the framework, at least one of the Jena 6 accused appears not to be demoralized.[87] Perhaps because strong family, community, and legal support are protective factors.

5.1.2. Social Distinctions/Social Hierarchy

After the nativism phase of excluding the person being bullied, the student who bullies demotes the person being bullied to a lower social status. Children who bully have "a powerful feeling of dislike toward somebody considered to be worthless, inferior, or undeserving of respect" (p. 119).[85] In schools, like in society, social (distinctions include wealth, prestige, and social status as denoted by economic status,[88] reputation, grades, brands of clothing, shoes, and accessories, family background information (profession, place of employment, transportation to school, make and model of vehicles, and the location, type, and size of house), ethnicity,[89,88] and race. It could also be mannerisms, poise, or how a student approaches teachers and peers.[74] Elgar et al.[90] found the following:

> The cycle of discrimination and retaliation might start among adolescents who ostracize poorer classmates from their peer groups, or might start as class snobbery in parents that is passed down to their children. [F]eelings of shame, humiliation, and distrust intensify with greater income inequality and create a harsh social environment where violent acts such as school bullying may be condoned or ignored.

Despite Dietrich and Cohen's[88] findings, people who bully are not always Socially disadvantaged. They "may be top students, captains of sports teams, or just in general leaders among their peers" (p. 119).[85] Among equally affluent students, bullying may be centered around looks, popularity, who throws the best parties, or other trivial reasons to harass their peers. Often, students who engage in bullying behavior and are targets of bullying become social outcasts, the bully for terrorizing their targets and students who fear them, and the person being bullied for being excluded or for possessing what the bully lacks and desires,[90] or holds in contempt.[85] By contrast, some scholars found that the "distinguishing factor between bullies and non-bullies is not their social status, but their inability to channel or control aggressive feelings—and this inability can show up in anyone" (119).[85]

5.1.3. Misinformation/Dishonesty

> Humanity's greatest weapon is that we lie. We lie to our friends; we lie to our enemies.
>
> —Dune, 2024

Misinformation is false or misleading information with or without the intent to deceive. It includes disinformation, myths, doxa, lying through omission, and various other species of falsehood. The fabrication of information is often

leveraged to control people's behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and thinking. Hence, it is understandable why students who bully create myths about the students they target for bullying. Misinformation often starts with assumptions. Assumptions about the person being bullied are followed by rumor-spreading and labeling.[19] It can also take the form of doctoring other students' pictures on social media and flawed beliefs about the person being bullied's intelligence, appearance, and intentions. Moreover, students who bully fabricate myths to justify their actions. They may deny engaging in bullying behaviors and try to convince their peers not to be friends with the person targeted for bullying. Targets of bullying can be stigmatized because of the spreading of dishonest information. Stigma is accompanied by shame, exclusion, and emotional trauma.

5.1.4. Fear

Gourneau (p. 119)[85] wrote: "Bullying is systematic violence used to intimidate and maintain dominance. Terror struck in the heart of the child-targeted is not only a means to an end; it is an end in itself." Power and intimidation are innate to bullying. Students fear being alienated by their peers and teachers due to the stigma often associated with rumors. Fear affects learning, retention, and recall. The stress associated with fear has devastating effects on psychological, emotional, and physical well-being. It could lead to subjugation, demoralization, violence, or a combination. "When the bully can sense their victim is experiencing terror and lack of power, they aggressively operate 'without fear of recrimination and retaliation'" (p. 119).[85] As stated by Gourneau (p. 120):[85]

> After the bully has attained intimidation and authority, their target feels unworthy, isolated, and full of shame. Children who are bullied feel inferior to the bully causing them to become powerless [and] unlikely to retaliate or tell an adult, which leads the bullying cycle to continue and start all over.

5.1.5. Dehumanization/Humiliate

School-age children are more likely to develop fragile self-esteem when they feel criticized and unsupported by important people: parents, teachers, siblings, friends, and peers. Their self-worth starts to erode, and doubts emerge. They not only develop doubts, but they feel unloved and devalued. As a result, children with poor self-esteem may become depressed91 and afflicted with other emotional issues. Gourneau (p. 16)[85] stated:

> There is support for verbal bullying being the "first step toward more vicious and degrading" bullying behaviors. [Dehumanization], as it relates to bullying, involves calling others names, making sexual remarks, aggressive emails and phone calls, racial comments, cruel jokes, spreading rumors, violent threats, gossip… name-calling and verbal harassment can be targeted at the victim's appearance, race, ethnic background, religion, gender, and social status. Once children are verbally abused they begin to feel [further] dehumanized, leading them to feel excluded from their school and the outside world.

Other dehumanizing tactics exist. For example, one of the most widely accepted humiliation strategies used by instructors is waiting for students who have not read the chapter or done their homework to provide the correct answer after what appears to be a long, agonizing period of silence. It strips students of the dignity of saving face as they sit in silence, reflecting various thoughts, including why their instructor insists on making them appear less than intelligent among their peers. Although some students may be resilient to redirection and forget or mock the

teacher behind their backs or engage in power play, some learners may translate the redirection as criticism or being singled out.[1]

5.1.6. Subjugation/Overwhelm

Socially excluded, fearful, misinformed, and dehumanized students are more likely to become controlled and targeted by students who bully others, engage in bullying behavior, or both. As victims of bullying, the trauma experienced may lead to maladaptive schemas[91] and behaviors: substance misuse, risky intimate behaviors, crime, and violence (e.g., suicide, assault, and homicide). At the other end of the spectrum, people who feel subjugated often do not flourish. They may struggle financially (e.g., staying employed or leaving a job that makes them unhappy), with relationships (entering, maintaining, or ending them), with psychological and health problems, or a combination. Childhood bullying can often leave an indelible mark on the student being bullied and the student who bullies others. This is because each phase in the process introduces a new source of trauma that reinforces previous trauma. As the student being bullied becomes progressively disempowered and entrapped,[37] the person who bullies becomes empowered. Entrapment leads to feeling defeated and is linked to suicide risk, post-traumatic stress disorder, and reactive aggression, which can be caused by unmet needs (e.g., security/well-being). However, having a strong support system, social and coping skills, positive self-esteem, and being a provocative target who is "more outspoken and more confident" (p. 121)[85] are protective factors against the detrimental effects of bullying and demoralization.

5.2. A Framework for Interventions and Social Change

Students need to be empowered.[92] As a process that empowers at every stage, Forde's[61] democratic social change process will serve as the paradigm that school officials can leverage to frame interventions that will empower students who are targets of bullying. Psychological, sociological, political science, and anthropological studies support the concepts. Individuals are empowered and motivated at every level of the social change process (p. 99).[61] They contribute to self-esteem, "autonomy, self-determination, and self-actualization (p. 92).[17]

5.2.1. Knowledge

Knowing school bullying includes arming students with coping and social skills, knowing who to report bullying behaviors to, and knowing how to end bullying. During the knowledge process, the student and teacher notice situations at school that are out of the norm. These situations make the person being bullied and adult observers feel uncomfortable with the oppressive bullying conditions. The student and adult observers may even recognize the unconscious participation of instructors.[1] Unconscious participation includes ignoring or minimizing bullying incidents, making statements like, "That is why you do not have friends," and "Just ignore them" (without equipping the student with skills to ignore others), or pointing out when the student is not prepared for class, talking in class, forgot their homework, lost their place, and other comments that may cause the learner to feel shame, guilt, or resentment. Danielson and Jones[26] found that emotional support by school faculty and staff followed by information (problem-solving solutions) leads to a better appraisal of advice quality. For learners, knowledge comes from leveraging social and communication skills, impression management, and building a support network

to provide emotional support and information on handling someone who bullies.[26] Arming students with appropriate communication or adaptation skills can reduce bullying incidents.[18,31]

School or community mental health professionals can teach bully-involved students cognitive behavior skills. Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is a therapeutic intervention considering the interconnectedness of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. CBT focuses on identifying and changing negative thoughts and behavior patterns that are associated with or may lead to emotional and psychological distress and physiological responses.[18] It is "considered the first-line treatment" for several psychological disorders that are outcomes of bullying victimization (e.g., depression and anxiety; p. 4).[18] CBT is used to introduce positive cognitive coping strategies "associated with better mental health outcomes" that help targets of bullying see different perspectives through which to explore bullying (p. 4),[18] the role of persons who bully, and the power the person being bullied wields against the effects of bullying. As an intervention, CBT can be leveraged to increase knowledge of coping skills and help preserve the human dignity of targets of bullying. It could also help change the perspective of people who bully to prevent future bullying behavior**.**

5.2.2. Fairness

People who have been targeted by persons who bully have a primary grievance that has been described by Silvers et al.:[93]

> A perception — not necessarily based in reality — of having been wronged or treated unfairly or inappropriately. More than a typical feeling of resentment or passing anger [which leads to] a grossly distorted preoccupation with a sense of injustice. These thoughts can saturate a person's thinking and foster a pervasive sense of imbalance between self-image and the (real or perceived) humiliation. This nagging sense of unfairness can spark an overwhelming desire to "right the wrong" and achieve a measure of satisfaction and/or revenge (p. 21).[93]

Feelings of unfairness can often lead to conscientization,[64] which makes the target of bullying and observers aware of how the bullying target is being treated through no fault of their own. Conscientization makes the victim and observers aware of the situation and environment and how bully-involved students and bystanders are perceived. Children and adults alike thrive in what they perceive as a fair environment. Fairness is showing equal respect and kindness for all students, especially to targets of bullying. When students were asked how they would like to be treated, they responded, "I would like everyone to be nice to everyone, to treat each other fairly, kindly, and respectfully" (p. 123).[85] Students who are the object of bullying or adults who undergo conscientization may seek to create a fair environment by reporting the incidents, asking the student who is bullying to stop, and talking to peers to garner their disapproval of the bullying behavior. However, these attempts are often ineffective for targets of bullying due to a lack of social capital,[94] poor social skills,[31,35] poor coping skills, or a combination. Students may confide the bullying to teachers, principals, or guidance counselors, who only further reinforce feelings of being unheard, ignored,[1,25,27] excluded, and disempowered.[19]

Relationships "characterized by respect, trust, validation, and empathy" (p. 26)[96] could nurture feelings of fairness in students. Teachers who responded to bullied students with emotional support made learners feel heard.[26] By

contrast, postgraduate learners are less likely to seek fairness out of fear of ramifications, increased bullying, and feelings of hopelessness.[29] In the context of bullying, fairness is free. Ending the unfair practice of one or more students dehumanizing another, supporting a person being bullied, using kind and uplifting words, and student empowerment cost nothing. Student support is beneficial for students, teachers, and the learning environment.

5.2.3. Human Dignity

The human dignity phase is when the person being bullied and adult observers notice how bullying affects the bullying target's self-esteem and think of ways to preserve respect for their dignity. Respect for human dignity must start at birth. Two examples are "when a child signals while she is being fed that she has had enough and the caregiver stops feeding her, the child is ... granted autonomy regarding her food intake," and establishing "contact with the child and ask – if it is age appropriate – whether one should change his diaper now."[95] Likewise, respect for the human dignity of students requires respecting student diversity and ending the bullying the first time they ask for the bullying to stop. However, rather than stopping, the person being bullied is further dehumanized through various means like teasing, taunting, name-calling, hitting, and kicking.[19] Some students may be hypersensitive to verbal and nonverbal communication, which others may overlook.

Other students may have an unusually high need for others to show them respect, have a low tolerance for rejection, or overly identify with aggressive masculinity,[97,98] which compels them to protect their human dignity more than other students. Young learners develop at different paces, and some may not have the moral development to understand the concept of human dignity. Others may have a more advanced sense of moral development to recognize how bullying impacts their human dignity. In developing a sense of human dignity, mattering may be a big concern to the latter group. However, mattering or a sense of belonging is a significant concern for young people.[1,25,26,27,28] The absence of mattering and moral disengagement can lead to emotional and conduct problems such as bullying.[1,25,27,28] However, fostering a sense of school esteem and belonging in students has been shown to mitigate bullying incidents.[26,36]

Too often, students feel different but are unaware of why they think that way.[19] Targets of bullying blame themselves,[19] and are unaware of traits and symptoms of discovered or undiagnosed emotional disorder or learning disability. Natural mentors can assist targets of bullies in valuing themselves by helping them understand themselves and sharing positive role models who share their differences. For example, youths who are bullied because of a learning disability or severe emotional disturbance who learn the symptoms of their diagnosis (e.g., how the symptoms are expressed, what worsens the symptoms of ADHD or depression) are more likely to understand the differences others see in them and why. The act of verbalizing what other students with ADHD or depression experience as a result of their diagnosis can often help them reclaim a sense of normality.

Knowing there are successful professionals in the field afflicted by the same learning difficulties or emotional issues can often remove stigma and feelings of shame. However, knowing they are not alone in the world and that there are successful "different" others is not enough. Teachers can help targets of bullying learn their triggers, the process they go through before responding to triggers, the different ways in which the student responds to triggers, ways they wish they could respond to triggers, which interventions can de-escalate their response to triggers, which

interventions are likely to increase the likelihood a negative response to triggers, and what makes the trigger lose its power over them. This information increases their self-love and self-respect and imbues them with hope. Respect for their dignity can be reinforced through behavior management boards that include rewards (e.g., holding the door for students, leading in line for lunch or recess, handing out worksheets, collecting papers, or any activity that puts the student in a positive light).

Moreover, students are more likely to use coping skills or stop bullying if their teachers and other natural mentors reward them with a smile, a nod, a thumbs up, or a word of encouragement. Students who engage in bullying behavior need positive attention when they are behaving and not targeting students. Respect for the human dignity of children was described by George[95] as follows:

- explicitly recognising the personhood and dignity of young children;
- establishing symmetrical relationships of respect between children and adults, rather than the more usual asymmetrical relationships;
- translating abstract rights – a child's own rights as well as other people's – into tangible everyday behaviour;
- encouraging each child to understand the intrinsic value of his or her self, as well as the value of another person's self; and,
- promoting early exposure to values of human dignity and behaviour oriented towards respect (pp. 17, 18).[95]

Another intervention that could help show respect for the dignity of students who engage in bullying and who are targets of bullying is the life space crisis interview. Life space interview is a therapeutic intervention that embraces the social change process—knowledge, fairness, respect for human dignity, hope, unity, and security. The intervention "[validates] the student's feelings and helps to re-establish trust and faith with the teacher/adult" (p. 28).[96] "Caring relationships are characterized by respect, trust, validation, and empathy" (p. 26).[96] Life space interview uses verbal exchange to help students process and understand the incident that triggered the intervention.[96] The therapeutic exchange occurs after a crisis, negative behavior, or a stressful situation (e.g., school bullying). Bully-involved students benefit from the life space interview. The intervention requires "that the teacher/adult and the student discuss what happened and develop a plan to minimize the chance of another incident" (p. 28).[96] School administrators should consider requiring the life space interview as one of three default therapeutic interventions teachers/adults use with students who engage in bullying and the person being bullied upon encountering bullying incidents.

5.2.4. Hope

It is suggested that the single most effective intervention for demoralization is hope. The hope phase of the social change process leads to the person being bullied or observers imagining pathways to end the bullying. They hope for fairness and the equal preservation of their human dignity.[17] Students often solicit the help of teachers and students. Hope empowers and imbues people with courage[99,100] and steers people away from despondency,

alienation, maladaptive behaviors, and suicide.[101-103,65] Moreover, hope affects self-esteem, motivation, resilience, problem-solving skills, health, well-being, and grades.[104] Interventions are vehicles of hope creating pathways to security (e.g., gun control strategies, metal detectors, and resource officers), knowledge (e.g., social skills building, cognitive behavior therapy, and dialectical therapy), fairness, and respect for human dignity (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA], Individuals With Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], and 504), and unity (e.g., natural mentors and family team meetings). Nevertheless, few adults and intervention programs deliberately attempt to teach children and adolescents how to create pathways for those things they hope for, which could encourage them to be hopeful and know there is a way to plan for the future.

Hopeful individuals can internalize and integrate the hope of others. Teachers can imbue students with hope and develop a pathway to end the bullying. Internalized and integrated hope is evident in education when a student hopes to get an A in class without creating a pathway to earn an A. This type of hope is like "hoping for better weather conditions" (p. 2).[105] Action-oriented hope requires imagination, a plan, and active pursuit of the hoped-for goal;[65] is not a novel idea. In the Christian tradition, hope is tied to action: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8);[106] "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone….shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works" (James 2: 17-19),[106] are but two examples. However, Snyder[65] is responsible for measuring and conceptualizing hope as goal + pathways + agency.

To nurture hope in children and adolescents, teachers must be able to help them visualize pathways leading to the end of bullying.[65] This is because youths with certain types of learning disabilities, emotional or conduct disorders, and some families experiencing economic scarcity are more likely to engage in concrete thinking.[107] Because youths among this population are also more likely to have self-esteem issues, natural supports must motivate targets of bullying to buy into having the potential to learn new skills. Hope for the student may be accomplished through CBT, attainment and implementation of new social skills, and life space crisis interviews.[35,108] Teaching children and adolescents through role-play or live opportunities could help build the confidence needed to interact with students who engage in bullying without fear or violence. Life space crisis interviews can help balance the power between the student who bullies and the student being bullied. These specific interventions can give students hope because social skills attainment reduces bullying incidents,[35] and students are empowered when they feel their teachers hear them.[31,32,55,109] Hope for older students may be accomplished by creating an anti-bullying committee at school, online, or in the community.[29]

5.2.5. Unity

Unity for targets of bullying takes the form of supportive peers, teachers, school staff, parents, and friends. A sound support system fosters unity (see social network theory (SNT) and social capital theory). Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological framework[18] can guide the unity strategy. This approach involves a collaborative effort by school personnel, parents, and mental health providers who can provide meaningful social support.[1,32,35,109] Parents, teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and community service providers could help reduce incidents and the

impact of bullying,[1,34,88,109] provide a means by which to teach and reinforce social (communication and problem resolution skills), and coping skills (ways to ignore the criticism using cognitive behavior therapy skills, and perspective-taking).[31,32] Emotional support was ranked as the most effective means of supporting younger bullied targets.[26] Social support is a protective factor against demoralization. It is known to have a positive effect on female targets of bullying but the opposite effect on male targets of bullying, indicating prudence in selecting support strategies to assist male students.[26]

The intervention recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence for children and adolescents with severe emotional disturbance and conduct problems is Multisystemic Therapy.[110] Multisystemic Therapy is an intensive home-based program that aims to keep youths with families by addressing problem behaviors or symptomatology.[12,110] Service providers focus on the participant's home, school, and community to assess the youth's behaviors in these areas. The service provider develops a plan to address issues that brought the youth into contact with the program and enlist the support of natural mentors to help resolve problem behaviors that stem from emotional, conduct, and learning issues. Multisystemic Therapy is an intervention that helps youths with conduct problems,[31,110] targets of child maltreatment,[111,112] and emotional issues.[110] School therapists or partnering with community service providers can get students the support they deserve.

Multisystemic Therapy takes an ecological perspective, a holistic approach to addressing the needs or problems of students,[2] which may have led to or contributed to emotional and conduct problems. Natural mentors (e.g., teachers, case managers, and coaches)[33] seek to address conduct problems in home, school, and community domains. Contacts are made with family members, school personnel, and community organization staff (e.g., religious organizations and after-school programs).[10] This ecological network unites and creates a support system for youths. Multisystemic Therapy is but one intervention to help children and adolescents with conduct disorders that result from bullying involvement. The intervention is framed around the ecological approach, which secures multiple levels of support for troubled youths.

Wraparound is another intervention school officials can recommend. This service adopts the ecological approach to treatment,[10] which helps children and adolescents with severe emotional disturbance and conduct problems stay in the community. These services are often provided by local community service boards that attempt to meet the needs of children and adolescents with severe emotional and behavioral problems, some of whom may be forensic consumers, justice-involved youths who, along with having a diagnosis of depression, bipolar, AD/HD, or a dual diagnosis, are afflicted by learning disabilities: A factor that exacerbates emotional and conduct issues. Despite barriers to assessing the quality of the programs, Multisystemic Therapy shows promising results for youths in America versus youths in other high-income nations.[12] In contrast, Wraparound has shown some success in keeping children with severe emotional problems in the home.[10]

5.2.6. Security

Security is defined as safety and cognitive, physical, financial, emotional, spiritual, or psychological well-being.[17] Security for students is the same as it is for teachers. In the educational setting, security includes mattering, physical safety, psychological well-being, educational support, improved academic standing, coping skills, social skills

competency, peer support, and friends who like them, for example. Genuine support from instructors can often lead to a sense of security for younger students (see Travis Hirschi's social bond theory).[113,114] School security is met when students love being in school because these students are not targets of constant harassment, have good student-teacher and student-peer relationships, and are likely appropriately challenged. A supportive teacher-student relationship protects against demoralization, social deprivation,[113] delinquency, substance use, dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, and unemployment.[114] This is because supportive teacher-student relationships make students feel they are liked and matter.[1,25,27,28,95]

6. Conclusion

The application of the framework to bullying answers: In which areas would the democratic social change grounded theory resonate the most? It provides a novel perspective on the problem of school bullying and mass shootings, disempowerment that could lead to demoralization—a phenomenon "that is not necessarily related to the presence of a psychiatric disorder" (p. 142).[38] It could afflict targets of bullying who have lost hope, feel helpless, have poor coping skills, lack meaningful support,[37,38] feelings of worthlessness, and perceptions of justice,[44] but do not have a mental health disorder. Although there is no research data on demoralization among targets of bullying, it is not unreasonable to suspect a percentage of students who are targets of bullying to have comorbidities (e.g., severe emotional disorder and learning disability),[38] lack social support, and meet the criteria for demoralization to react violently in their attempt to preserve their human dignity. Emotional and psychological trauma can trigger a young person who is persistently humiliated to react with violence beyond a schoolyard brawl. Demoralization has considerable overlap with psychiatric disorders.[37,38] and behavioral symptomology of school mass shooters.[3]

Forde's social change framework could help educators and school administrators understand the processes and outcomes of positive and negative transformation. Existing literature on school bullying supports the transformational processes with particulars, making it possible for highly abstract concepts to become known.[58] Protective factor particulars include a positive school climate, transparent and fair rules that are applied justly, perception of safety, interpersonal relationships, climate of coexistence, teacher support, teacher promoting mutual respect, a sense of belonging, school attachment, and security and rules that lead to security (pp. 5, 6).[86] Some particulars that support the disempowerment process are cliques, peer influence, peer status, name-calling, rumors, and fear of bullying. While a demoralized student with a weapon who is emotionally and mentally numb may attempt to protect their human dignity by engaging in school mass shootings, other demoralized students may attempt or commit suicide. Many more adolescents psychologically and emotionally retreat[72] from life and cope with demoralization by engaging in offending or risky behaviors, substance abuse, or dropping out of school. There should be no doubt that interventions are needed to disrupt the demoralization process, reduce incidents of violence, and "restore morale, hope, and meaning" (p. 1)[37] in the lives of students who are targets of bullying.

6.1. Future Research and Limitations

The primary limitation in applying the theory to school bullying is the reliance on extant data on the demoralization of adults to support the framework's application. The size of the theoretical sample is controversial. The 18 theoretical samples from which the concepts emerged may be considered too small. Another limitation is the ability

to compare the demoralization process with other demoralization processes from the perspective of the person who seeks to demoralize others or one that may be triggered by school bullying. Clark and Kissane's[115] demoralization process is from the vantage point of the demoralized: (1) a stressful situation or event creates a feeling of insecurity about their future, (2) the person is at a loss as to what they should do, (3) they are unable to resolve the problem by themselves, (4) they may seek help from others. The unmet needs in Clark and Kissane's[115] demoralization process could be met by the positive social change process as a framework for intervention: creating a sense of security, knowledge/competence, and a viable pathway that gives them hope and unity, respectively. These interventions could lead to human dignity and a sense of a fair world. However, research is needed to validate the social change processes as a unified framework and independent processes. More research is needed to explore:

- the relationship between bullying and demoralization,
- the relationship between bullying, mental health disorders, and demoralization among school shooters,
- the role of alexithymia (deficits in processing emotions; p. 428)[116] and antipsychotic medications—which are known to cause emotional and cognitive numbing[117] in demoralization,
- age-appropriate demoralization screening tool for bully-involved children and adolescents,
- the perception of mattering, demoralization, respect for their human dignity, and how these factors interact together for students who engage in school mass shootings,
- the perceptions of justice of students who engaged in school mass shootings, and,
- the lengths to which bully-involved youths go to protect their human dignity.

Exploring these topics could lead to effective demoralization interventions with manifest consequences: prevent bullying-associated trauma and school mass shootings, disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, and reduce attrition, substance dependence, and risky behavior. It is suggested that the empowering framework will lead to student well-being by reducing incidents of bullying that disempower and lead to demoralization.

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The author declares that she consented to the publication of this study.

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