

“Just Because I’m Different!”: The Call for Socio-Cultural Transformation of Covert Bullying Practices in Jamaican High Schools

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Abstract

With the growth of technology and social media, many forms of bullying in Jamaican high schools have intensified and remained covert, while promoting a climate of socio-cultural differences and relational aggression. The purpose of this article is to use the insights and implications garnered from a covert bullying study to share recommended transformational approaches and strategies that will reduce bullying practices and negative socio-cultural differences within local school communities, while also engendering a culture of equality and social justice.

Keywords: bullying, socio-cultural, differences, transformation, social justice, equity

Introduction

School bullying is a socio-cultural phenomenon that has transcended diverse societies and cultures within both developed and developing communities throughout the years, and has presented persistent mitigation challenges for educators, policy makers and school administrators (Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Lipman, 2003; Mishna, 2008; Rigby, 2011). School bullying has also evolved from a focus on physical forms to greater acknowledgement of indirect and relational forms and the negative impact that they have on students. These forms are promulgated by differences among peers that often operate on the premise of physical, cultural, social, and economic factors within

school communities (Hunt-Anderson, 2021). The main outcomes are rejection and exclusion that not only compromise students’ health, self-esteem and efficacy but also have sustained “left over effects” on victims (Hunt-Anderson, 2021). Williams (2008) asserts that exposure to bullying forms such as “negative verbal taunts” and being “demeaned and ridiculed” leads to the self being compromised (p. 228) and, among other things, students can lose their desire for school (Craig & Pepler, 2003; Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Rigby, 2003). Cyber technology and media systems have also intensified these indirect and relational forms of aggression and widened the sphere of

bullying within and across school communities. While schools persistently struggle with trying to mitigate this ever-growing problem, the literature shows that many intervention studies have had mediocre success rates and there is need for deeper understanding of the constructs and facilitators of the bullying regime.

This article draws on findings and implications from Hunt-Anderson's (2021) qualitative thesis of covert bullying among adolescent students, to argue that socio-cultural differences that pervade local schools and peer groups facilitate mechanisms that promote a culture of bullying practices within these learning communities. However, the term covert bullying must first be clarified. The original definition that guided the study was developed by Cross et al. (2009) who define covert bullying as:

any form of aggressive behaviour that is repeated, intended to cause harm and characterised by an imbalance of power, and is "hidden", out of sight of, or unacknowledged by adults. Covert bullying includes behaviours linked to social aggression, relational aggression or indirect aggression including bullying by means of technology where the bullying behaviour is either unwitnessed, or not addressed, by an adult. (Cross et al., 2009, p. 22).

Further, based on the findings in Hunt-Anderson's (2021) study, covert bullying can also be defined as bullying that people do not pay attention to or that is insufficiently addressed by adults or the status quo. Bullying in this context may involve any persistent mix of offences or form of aggression (physical, social, psychological), with or without intention towards another that elicits negative emotions (e.g., "feeling bad", "feeling sad") and negative outcomes — more commonly low self-esteem and anxiety.

The main purpose of this article is to use the insights and implications garnered from the study's findings and theoretical underpinnings to provide a framework of recommendations and transformational strategies to not only curb the practices of bullying and socio-cultural differences among youth; but also, engender a culture of equality and social justice in Jamaican school communities.

Background and Rationale

The Jamaican Context and Culture

Caribbean societies such as Jamaica are entrenched in a history of plantocracy and colonialism that have established cultural divisions and differences attached to symbols and norms of money, socio-economic status (SES), race and colour (Chevannes, 2006; Miller, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Sherlock & Bennett, 1998). These historic-sociocultural systems are further encrusted by popular local sub-cultures and the dynamic modern society, and promulgated through homes, schools, and communities.

Dancehall for instance, plays a central role in establishing our national identity (Research for Development, 2011). According to Stanley Niaah (Research for Development, 2011), dancehall is an amalgamation of plantocracy and post-colonial cultures, heightened by the dynamic themes that modern societal cultures and music impose. These include themes related to male dominance, gendered norms, sexual promiscuity, and violence that appeal to the youth (Hope, 2006a, 2006b). The dancehall culture is also embellished with dance hype creators, music promoters, entertainers, and other members of the industry who are either idolized or become role models for young people (Hope, 2006a).

Heavy engagement in social media and video viewing is another practice that resonates with youngsters and adolescents across all echelons of local and larger societies. These media platforms provide shared communal social spaces for establishing autonomy and adopting new and hype trends and cultures related to sex, fashion, and gaining in-group status on the social scene (Forbes, 2010). Nonetheless, Forbes (2010) contends that the intervention of adults, especially parents and family, can provide significant mediation in how youngsters make meaning of messages on social media — including their orientations to sex and sexuality.

The Jamaican School System

Jamaica's Ministry of Education (MOE) has persevered in its efforts to provide greater educational support systems and national

assessments to meet the international mandate for children's right to access equality of educational opportunity for all (UNESCO, 2007). This has resulted in greater numbers of students of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds matriculating into average and higher performing high schools. Average and higher performing high schools are determined based on students' performances in national school-based assessments. Concurrently, bullying-related school violence continues to rise despite the MOE's implementation of anti-violence policies and programs (Soyibo & Lee, 2000; UNESCO, 2007). Hence, the need for Jamaica's educational system to protect its children from "bullyism" (Hunt-Anderson (2021; Thomas, 2010); which in part calls for a cultural makeover that addresses teacher reform and the status quo (Thompson, 2009). To this end, Thompson (2009) proposes a highly responsive customer/student-oriented culture and climate that will prioritize students' concerns; address indiscipline with both concern and respect for students; and is inclined towards listening rather than being listened to, in order to effect quality leadership whilst nurturing relations with students. Additionally, teachers should adopt a sense of commitment towards action that will promote positive change.

The main source of inspiration for the study of covert bullying among local high school students was the many bullying reports from children in Hunt-Anderson's (2017, 2021) circle of family and friends in Jamaica. While social media reports of bullying incidents were increasing, the literature revealed very few topical studies on bullying focussed on covert bullying or adolescent narratives. Hence the need for this study.

The purpose of the study reported in this article was to explore the covert bullying experiences of adolescents attending different types of Jamaican high schools. The study also aimed to give students, especially the marginalized, opportunities to have a voice by sharing their own perspectives; and to provide advocacy for students' "rights to safety, social justice and quality education" (UNESCO, 2007, p. 4). The main question used to guide the study was:

How do students describe their experiences of bullying in Jamaican high schools?

Literature Review

The Nature and Impact of "Difference"

Phoenix (1998) defines difference as anything that sets a student apart from their peers, and students who appear different to others are often predisposed to being bullied. Connotations of difference are often expressed in students' victimization repertoires in bullying studies (e.g., Khosropour & Walsh, 2001). For instance, various combinations of race or ethnicity; physical size (height or weight); clothing; exceptionality; special education needs; smartness/academic prowess; sexual preference (real or perceived); accent; religious affiliation or moral stance, may communicate being different. Several of these factors were explicated in Williams' (2008) survey of college freshmen's K-12 experiences in Virginia, and Hunt-Anderson's (2017, 2021) studies of bullying among high school students in Jamaica. Hunt-Anderson's (2021) study elaborates that differences are often constructs of the historic-sociocultural and modern symbols and norms adopted from Jamaican society. This position is supported by Miller et al. (2013) and other researchers in various ways (see Horton, 2011; Khosropour & Walsh, 2001; Kruger, 2011; Phoenix, 1998; Reid et al., 2004; Teräsahjo & Salmivalli, 2003). Olweus's (1996) position is, however, that bullying is the outcome of individual pathologies and contextual factors such as a bully's need for dominance and power, the victim's response patterns, and parenting styles. Olweus (2003) does not necessarily attribute bullying to factors such as class size, academic prowess, or externals such as overweight, red-hair, glasses, accent, dress code, or even low self-esteem or insecurity.

Teräsahjo and Salmivalli's (2003) findings provide evidence that bullying repertoires are the outcomes of social discourses and relations that are espoused in the larger societal culture and manifested in the classroom. Furthermore,

within the confines of a diverse, pluralized school community, historic-sociocultural differences are intensified (Horton, 2011) while they serve adolescents' needs to establish a sense of self-identity, popularity, and place (Hunt-Anderson, 2021). Local researcher, M. G. Smith describes post-independence Jamaica as a plural society that has cultivated many, deep "divisions and differences" (as cited in Sherlock and Bennett, 1998, p. 390). Similarly, Chevannes (2006) supports the unchanging nature of our compromised social relations. Consequently, historic, socio-cultural differences also dictate the quality of teacher and peer behaviours that manifest in power relations (Horton, 2011; Phoenix, 1998) and outcomes of rejection or acceptance and inclusion or exclusion (Hunt-Anderson, 2021). Teräsahjo and Salmivalli's (2003) interviews with 74 Finnish students revealed that bullying repertoires of "odd" and "deserving" victims (p. 146) that are construed as "unproblematic and justified" (p. 134) may be underestimated. Teräsahjo and Salmivalli (p. 153) also report that bullied victims are often problematized as deviants; being "different" or "odd" and "guided by demands for conformity". As such, subsequent manifestations are either open or more subtle forms of hostility that do not coincide with the anti-bullying attitudes articulated in surveys and other research.

The impact of covert forms of bullying on children includes, but is not limited to, low self-esteem; anxiety; depression; fear of school; suicidal ideation; and issues with trust, anger, and social relations, among other things (Cross et al., 2009; Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Thompson, 2009). Researchers (e.g., Cross et al., 2009; Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Williams, 2008) also accentuate the underestimation of covertly deemed, bullying behaviours that are often normalized, and/or go unnoticed by adults or the status quo. Many of these negative behaviours are underlined by socio-cultural and physical differences among students (Hunt-Anderson, 2021). They may in effect be precursors that incite larger forms of violence in school and the society at large (Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Williams, 2008). Educators are therefore challenged to ensure students'

rights to safety and a nurturing learning environment (Cross et al., 2009; Dunne et al., 2010; Spears et al., 2008; Williams, 2008).

Intervention and Prevention

Baldry and Farrington (2000) suggest that intervention efforts to mitigate bullying in schools warrant more evidence-based research for success. Possible explanations for this relate to the difficulty in detecting quiet forms of intimidation and exclusion; and subsequent effects of these forms being underestimated, exacerbated by the passive nature of victims' responses, and lack of teacher sensitivity to and cognizance of its nature and adverse impact (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Hunt-Anderson, 2021).

Ttofi et al. (2008) conducted meta-analyses of 59 evaluation reports of 30 intervention programs in 25 developed countries. The results revealed that school-based programs in experimental schools resulted in bullying reduction rates of 17–23%. The meta-analyses showed that anti-bullying programs with older children and small groups that have been more effective often involve "parent training, improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods, school conferences, information for parents, classroom rules, classroom management, and videos" (p. 6). Of these, the most successful programs have been those that adopt Olweus' approach (Ttofi et al., 2008). As such, Olweus (2003) places great importance on the individual, peer support, and school context, and reports up to 50% reduction in bullying-related activities. However, despite limited research, other researchers emphasize the need for greater focus on addressing the peer group processes, power tiers, and dynamics that facilitate bullying (see Salmivalli, 2010; Craig & Pepler, 1995, 2003; Baldry & Farrington, 2000; Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Hunt-Anderson & Shannon-Baker, 2023). This includes, among other strategies, intercepting the power-seeking status of group leaders who incite bullying; and providing the necessary peer mediation and support, especially from trained bystanders. (Bullock, 2002; Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Salmivalli, 2010). Cowie et al.'s (2002) longitudinal study involving 34 teachers, 413 students (13–16

years old), and 80 peer supporters showed that peer support systems are very effective, despite any macho gender-related issues that might arise (Smith & Brain, 2000). Strategies may also include “befriending, conflict resolution, counselling-based schemes” according to Smith and Brain (2000, p. 6). Dunne et al. (2010) and Hunt-Anderson (2021) elaborate that, although peer friendships and support may curtail bullying practices, the negative emotional impact on bullying targets may be sustained, particularly for girls.

In addition to intervention programs, prevention is another approach that Olweus (2003) advocates. Olweus and Limber’s (2010) longitudinal prevention studies conducted across 42 schools between 1983 and 1985 and repeated in another 30 schools between 1997 and 1998, reported reductions of 21–50% in antisocial and bullying behaviours. Contrarily, the review of literature carried out by Swearer et al. (2010) suggests that bullying prevention programs have had little success in mitigating the bullying impact in schools.

Although intervention and prevention methods have no doubt had some levels of success in reducing the bullying impact in schools across the globe, the literature highlights that the more preferred approach to bullying reduction in schools is a whole-school (ecological) intervention program. This type of anti-bullying program incorporates all the ecological factors into consideration, including the individual, peers, family, school, and community — although programs may have different emphases (Bullock 2002; Swearer et al., 2010; Kruger, 2011). For instance, Swearer et al. (2010) stipulate the need to pay attention to methodological approaches in actioning the program, while Bullock (2002) accentuates the need for special focus on the individual and classroom, and engaging children in the development of explicit anti-bullying policies and strategies. Bullock (2002) suggests anti-bullying strategies that include mentoring, mediation exercises, role play exercise “buddy” systems (p. 3) and counselling that would lend support while nurturing children’s self-esteem

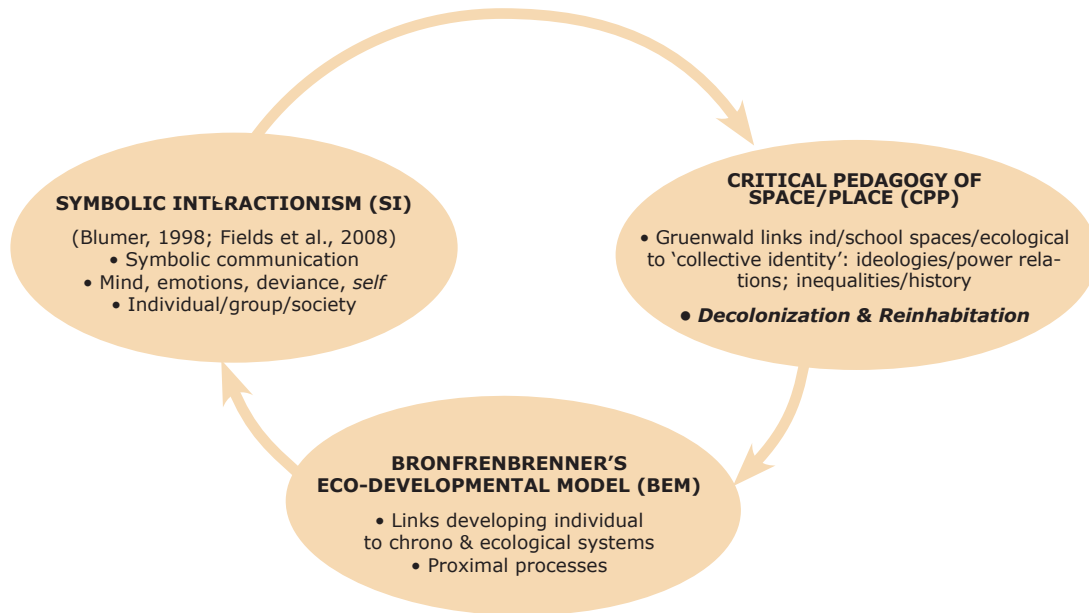
and efficacy. Smith and Brain (2000) further highlight mitigation approaches that call for non-punitive bullying sanctions (e.g., the No Blame and Pikas models); teacher training at both pre-service and in-service levels; training of interpersonal skills to enhance the general school climate and ethos; and the involvement of parents, teachers, and school boards in helping to develop anti-bullying initiatives and policies.

Several countries have also taken the holistic or whole-school approach to the national level to ensure greater access to resources and support systems that will aid the change process (McGuckin & Minton, 2013; Rigby, 2011; Smith & Brain, 2000). As an example, McGuckin & Minton (2013) share a holistic program that incorporates Bronfenbrenner’s ecological developmental model (BEM) into the structural model of Bildung-Psychology (Spiel et al., 2008). The holistic program addresses five areas of functionality — research (program design); instruction/training (train the trainers, trainers train teachers & parents, teachers train students); assessment (ongoing evaluation of program); pastoral care; and professional development (all within the organization/system). Simultaneously, the program also takes into consideration the developmental stages of the students. This is guided by both Erik Erikson and Bronfenbrenner’s models. Bronfenbrenner sets out ecological factors that impose on the child’s development at all levels of the society — micro, meso, eco, and macro; and Erik Erikson proposes 8 stages of human development. These are basic trust vs. basic mistrust (infancy); autonomy vs. shame and doubt (toddlerhood); initiative vs. guilt (early childhood); industry vs. inferiority (middle childhood); identity vs. role confusion (adolescence); intimacy vs. isolation (early adulthood); generativity vs. stagnation (middle adulthood); and ego integrity vs. despair (late adulthood) (McGuckin & Minton, 2013, pp. 7-8). The synthesized program was piloted by Spiel et al. (2008) in 42 schools in Ireland from 1998–2000; and a subsequent bully-victim survey that showed a significant reduction of 50–69% in bullying activity.

The Theoretical Framework

Figure 1

The Theoretical Framework adapted from Hunt-Anderson (2017, 2021)



In order for all aspects of bullying and its appendaged differences to be examined and adequately addressed, a tri-model theoretical framework (see Figure 1) was incorporated — Symbolic Interactionism (SI), Critical Pedagogy of Place (CPP), and Bronfenbrenner's eco-developmental model (BEM).

Bullying should be examined as a psycho-social problem that operates within a historical and sociocultural framework of social forces (Hunt-Anderson, 2017, 2021; Martocci, 2015) or aggressive mechanisms such as gossip, cruel teasing, rejection, social exclusion, stereotyping, personal exposure, sexual aggression and competition. These mechanisms attach symbolic labels and norms that convey non-conformity and difference, and control emotions of shame and humiliation in others. Communication and language therefore play a large role in the conveyance of norms; beliefs and behaviour systems; power and popularity motives; and the establishment of both unity and divisions (Hunt-Anderson, 2021; Martocci, 2015). In accordance,

the SI purports that reality is actively created through language and symbols that resonate with one's emotions, sense of identity and the self (Fields et al., 2006; Blumer, 1986). SI also speaks to the social, symbolic interactions, and meaning-making of both individual and group (collective) behaviours that underline deviance and social inequality (Mazzotta & Myers, 2008). Noteworthy however, is that "meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).

The CPP theory stipulates that community or school spaces are adapted structures of the overarching ecological and historical institutions, symbols, and norms of society that create situations of difference, social inclusion, and exclusion (Gruenewald, 2003). Further, the BEM "provides a conceptual framework to investigate the combined impacts of social contexts and influences on [adolescents] behavioural development" (Swearer et al., 2010, p. 42). BEM articulates 5 sub-systems in society — the micro,

meso, exo, macro, and chrono systems that interact with each other over time to influence behaviours and changes in the developing individual [adolescent] (e.g., technology). The microsystem constitutes close connections to the individual such as family, school peers, and teachers. The quality of proximal processes within this layer (e.g., teachers’ behaviours) therefore play an impactful role in influencing the individual’s emotions, meaning-making, and behaviours. The mesosystem encompasses the cross linkages in the adolescent’s microsystem that are directly influential—for instance, decision-making between teachers and parents; while the exo-system involves occurrences that have indirect influence on the adolescent. For instance, a parent’s change in job stressors or divorce could indirectly influence their child’s moods or behaviours. Finally, the macrosystem refers to the larger societal systems and cultural institutions that impose on the adolescent’s microsystem, such as national assessments that might impose extra stressors on the child and manifest in their behaviours (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40).

Methodology

In conducting this study, all ethical protocols designated by the affiliate university were adhered to in the data collection process. This included participants’ informed permission and anonymity to ensure their protection, and confidentiality. The approach was qualitative with a case study design (Yin, 2009) underlined by the Transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2012). This paradigm alludes to multiple realities in the construction of knowledge and promotes an agenda of social justice and equality within community settings (Mertens, 2012). It further emphasizes cultural and contextual sensitivity to the community being studied; and by extension, the interactive process between the participant and researcher and the nature of the problem. Hence, varied or combined research approaches (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) may be used. Qualitative case studies imbued with multiple research methods—student interviews,

group discussions, informal conversations and observations, and doodling — (defined as free expressions on paper in Hunt-Anderson and Shannon-Baker, 2023) were both suitable and justified for this study because these methods facilitated the voice of marginalized students in school communities; the covert and culturally-sensitive nature of this form of bullying; and trustworthiness of findings (Yin, 2009). Student narratives also helped to fill a gap in bullying literature. The methodological approach also underlines Mertens’ (2020) transformational agenda, which stipulates that prior to any effective intervention, the researcher must first strive “to contribute to better understandings of what is needed in communities and in the use of data” (p. 24).

Participants

The main participants in this study were a diverse group of 27 students identified across 9 traditional and private schools within Jamaican urban high schools, and representing different socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities. This level of diversity allowed for fairness and equality of voice represented in the data collection process. Participants were identified through convenience sampling, their willingness to join the study, and signed informed assent and consent from parents. The 27 male and female students were organized into four case studies according to their school type. Except for the private school case, the other three case studies were organized into low-performing (LP), average-performing (AP), and high-performing (HP) schools, established by the outcomes of the then local General School-based Assessment Tests (GSAT).

Three professional adolescent counsellors or experts, having no direct affiliation with the school system or the student participants in this study, also participated in semi-structured interviews. These were conducted subsequent to the student interviews and focus group sessions. This additional layer of expert adult data provided advocacy for participant students’ voices.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analyses

Qualitative data collection and analyses used a grounded theory approach. Student data were gathered through open-ended individual interviews, focused group discussions, doodling, informal observations conducted during interview sessions, and informal observations and conversations carried out in student participants' schools. Student participants, with the exception of three students, were not interviewed in their schools. Participants were given the choice of interview venues (e.g., YMCA, my home, student's home), places where they might feel safe and comfortable, and avoid intimidation from teachers or other students. Before interviews, students were adequately informed about the researcher's role and the purpose of the study, including their right to confidentiality and withdrawal at any time during the interview or group discussion. Permission was also garnered from each participant before recording the interview. Interviews were conducted with great sensitivity to the subject of bullying. Transcripts were later sent to each participant for member checking.

Student transcripts provided the main source of data and analyses. Using a thematic analysis approach, the transcripts were coded based on the research questions, but also allowed for open coding. Codes were organized into categories aided by NVivo software and developed into broader themes through triangulation of the data. Data triangulation was achieved by converging students' transcripts with student doodles and researcher field notes and memos gathered in informal conversations and observations. This process helped with interpreting the data, making inferences, and validating the findings.

Experts' transcripts were also analyzed and then compared with the students' themes and findings. This extra step in the research design provided triangulation of findings (Finlay, 2006) across different stakeholders that enhanced the credibility of student narratives and enriched the findings (Hunt-Anderson, 2021).

Findings

The main question that guided the study was: *How do students describe their experiences of bullying in their schools?* The qualitative findings were organized around 6 sub-questions that supported the main question. These questions and the 4 main themes that evolved from the data analysis—Bullying Situations, Profiles and Explanations, Bullying Impact, and Coping and Mitigation (Hunt-Anderson, 2017, 2021) — are addressed below. Given the confines of this article, only key findings are highlighted here. More detailed findings may be found in Hunt-Anderson (2017). In the following excerpts, several abbreviations are used. These include, Gr(grade) level; Co-ed (coeducational school); GP/AP (good/average performing school); HP (high performing school); LP (low performing school); HS (focus group includes a mix of students of upper middle & high socioeconomic backgrounds); LS (focus group includes students of working class & low socioeconomic backgrounds).

What is the nature of bullying and how is it facilitated based on students' experiences?

Bullying Situations. Bullying is largely perceived as a normal cultural practice or as joking, exacerbated by the sensitive nature of developing adolescents seeking self-affirmation; and the insensitivities of teachers and the administration in school communities. See the extracts below adapted from Hunt-Anderson (2017 & 2021).

Minnie (HP, Gr. 13) a tall, lean figure, talking through a perpetual smile with braces, voiced:

I personally, to me, it's bullying if that person seriously has a problem with it because, I don't know, I can't think of it as bullying... Wingz expounded while the others turned to listen, "It's a common thing, like a joke! I don't think it would be seen as bullying; it would be more like you personally have an issue with it... it's more a self-type of thing. You [the target] pull yourself down even if the person had no intention of doing it. They [the aggressor] are doing it out of just the way of the culture..."

(Extract from Minnie, Peppa, Wingz, in HS group discussion).

Kayla (GP/Coed & HP, Gr. 9) participated in both interview and the HS group discussion. She changed schools from GP to HP because of constant jeering from peers that targeted her because of her SES and skin tone. She posited that:

Yeah, people don't know that it hurts and people just don't know that they are doing it...so if they knew how people felt that it was actually this big of a problem...Then maybe they would realize, you know, I need to stop...

(Kayla in extract of HS group discussion)

Bullying situations are facilitated by the popular in-group peer structures (both on the ground and virtually) in school communities. Tamara (AP/Girls, Gr. 10), shares her thoughts on sexual coercion:

With the promoter guys nowadays promoting parties and so forth, they have a really wide group... sometimes girls find themselves wanting to be popular and probably have to have sex with one or more of the guys into the group to become a part of that group. Yes, so they want to be popular.

If you don't do it, you have to go stay by yourself. You're an outsider and people will look at you different, the new girl.

(Extract from Tamara's interview)

The in-groups adopt various historic, socio-cultural, and modern symbols and norms from the larger society to establish popularity and power; and, determine differences for inclusion and rejection among peers. In narratives, Silas (Gr. 12) expressed strongly that, "the main reason people get bullied is from differences". Difference is defined by non-conformity to societal symbols and norms related to money, social class, colour, race/ethnicity, gendered norms, appearance, residential location, among other things.

Sariana (GP/Coed, Gr. 10) shared, "For me, at my school, colour means class... It goes together. Once you have colour, you have class!"

Insensitivities and discrimination displayed by teachers reinforce the bullying regime in schools.

Wingz (2AP & PS) changed schools because of SES (socio-economic status), bullying from school peers, teachers, and the administration. She claimed that:

They all thought I thought I was better than everybody, even the teachers. Teachers would make it seem like, if I would try and answer a question, like even if it's right, they would look at me and be like, "okay let's give somebody else a chance", even if it's the first time I'm saying something, or if it's wrong they would make a big deal out of it and say like people like you have money, you don't need to be in school cause your parents will help you out and, it got to the point where even the Dean started behaving like that towards me... I was the only student who would get called out.

(Extract from Wingz in HS group discussion)

Wingz shared her experience of the group dynamic and being *different* in her school:

I think it was like a collective thing just because I was different and it was obvious, so different. I'm not sure if they felt threatened by an outsider so they were uncomfortable by somebody who wasn't like them around them, but they also made sure that I was feeling uncomfortable as well... I was just different in colour, they were more dark, I was considered upper class and they were considered lower class and they always used to, first it just started with like calling me out like "white rich girl" and stuff like that, and then as I got older and tried to ignore it's more like, they'd do more things like pull me around or like girls who were selling stuff in school, which they were not allowed to, they would always come to me and just bother me until I buy something from them. It was just things like that continuously.

(Extract from Wingz's interview, Girls AP & PS)

How do students describe a bully and victim?

Why do students bully each other?

Profiles and Explanations. The findings establish that in Jamaican schools, students engage in bullying mainly as a way of gaining popularity and status; defining the self; and

asserting leadership, power, and control among peers. There is no stereotype for victims or targets of bullying. Even well-adjusted students may become targets of bullying, as long as there is some perception of difference or non-conformity. Sariana explains sexual coercion and the repercussions of non-conformity:

He asked her if he can get sexual favours from her, and he said it raw. That's what he said on Whats App. And then she's like, "Hell no! That's not going to happen. You know what, come offa ma [off of my] What's App". Then he said it openly 'bout [about] how him only waan (about how he only wants to) talk to pretty girls, he was bashing her, 'bout how him only waan (about how he only wants to) talk to light skinned girls and the girl I'm talking about is dark skinned. She has nice dark skin, and he only wants to talk to skinny girls and the girl I'm talking about is very curvy. And then he told his friends what's happening and they started plastering her as well, but he switched it, he said that she was begging him sexual favours and him turn har [he turned her] down, say him doh [he said he doesn't] want no nasty gyal [girl] a touch him [touching him] or whatever.

(Extract from Sariana in LS group discussion, February 2014)

Students' narratives established connections between the historical and socio-cultural symbols and norms to the larger society. See Adonai's (Gr. 11) doodle below in Figure 2. Several students described bullies as leaders. Adonai perceived

bullying as a natural cultural tool for overcoming fear and establishing one's authority.

Adonai (GP, Grade 11) depicts culture as the central theme and its connections to history and other elements within the society (Adapted from Hunt-Anderson (2017 & 2021); Hunt-Anderson & Shannon-Baker, 2023)

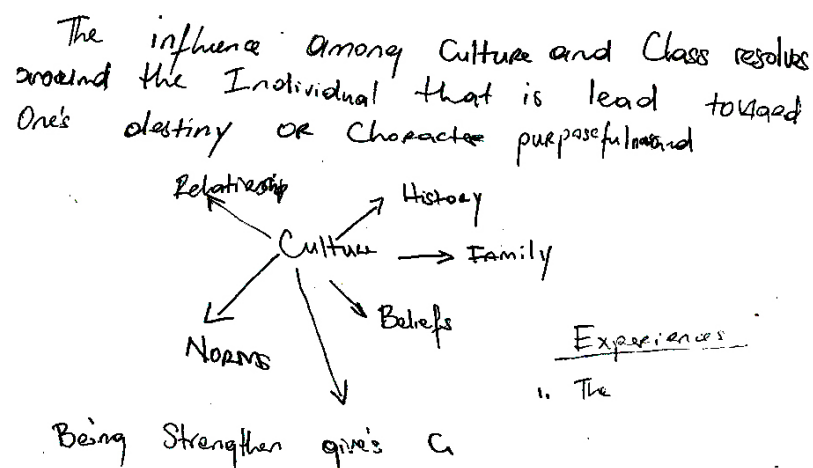
Sariana further asserts the connections between bullying and the influence of the society's historical and socio-cultural imperatives. In an interview with Tiana and her sister, Sariana explains below,

What I see and based on what my friends see because we talk about it a lot. As a literature and history student... I think that as much as it might sound crazy, we are travelling back from slavery days. If you think about the image of the planter over the slave and the colour prejudice at that time, the racism the fact that you were poor and I was rich because I'm white and you are black. It has travelled. We try to push it out of our country but it has stayed... you can actually feel the hatred coming from the black side to know that this person who just have a different colour is teasing me.

Words are what affect most students, words, cyber bullying, you know always being called a certain thing but here it's not just words. We are formed by our society in this thing we have anger in us. Sometimes it's fighting, hearing the constant fighting in bus park over simple things. We are very aggressive. (Extracts from Tiana & Sariana's interview).

Figure 2

Adonai's (Gr. 11) doodle. Adapted from Hunt-Anderson (2017, 2021) & Hunt-Anderson and Shannon-Baker (2023)



How are students impacted by covert bullying in their schools?

Bullying Impact. Personal exposure on social media, exclusion, and rejection are the most pervasive mechanisms used to connote difference in the bullying paradigm. The findings also showed that students experience low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (among other things), and are subject to even holding grudges as a result of bullying.

She had low self-esteem...she could do her work and all, but you know, when you're going to high school, your hormones and all of that. An incident happened...teenagers are insensitive bad because they don't think, they pulled up pictures, other pictures that they got off the internet.

(Extract from Sariana in Tiana & Sariana's interview)

How do students cope with bullying?

What do students suggest for mitigating bullying in their schools?

Coping and Mitigation. Adolescents prefer a sense of autonomy, and lean heavily on friendships and group support to help them cope with personal victimization or bullying at school (rather than family or teachers). However, many friendships are not grounded and may backfire due to non-conformity or cliquing of some kind. An instance of friendship support was conveyed by Peppa (HP, Gr. 10), who shared in group discussion how she relied heavily on her friends in managing students' perception that she was gay.

I could be in a real slump right now...and they (friends) really helped me with that, saying that...I know you're not, and at the end of the day even if you were anyway, I wouldn't think of you any less you know...but then they (friends) went away so it kind a got bad again, but then it got fine. Like suppose a person didn't decide to be friends with me, I could be in a real slump right now and I could just let it affect me. And I wouldn't have any friends and I wouldn't talk to anybody 'cause I would just think "Oh God. They think I am gay!"

(Extract from Peppa in HS group discussion).

While some participants voiced that bullying is an inevitable part of school life, they also communicated the need for strong peer group support systems, raising awareness and re-education of teachers, and general sensitization of the status quo as important in helping to redefine and control the bullying culture in local schools.

I think more schools need to have more peer counsellors and better trained peer counsellors; so, somebody who is in the age group who is friends with this person, friends with that person can see what's happening and because I'm...so I'm not going to talk to you from this point of authority where I feel like I'm being spoken down to. I'm gonna speak to you on your level and relate to you and help you to relate, cause I'm your age and I'm around you.

(Extract from Wingz' individual interview).

Discussion

The key findings from Hunt-Anderson's (2017, 2021) study convey that, somewhat in agreement with Horton (2011) and Thomas (2010), within the diverse and confined school spaces in Jamaica, socio-cultural differences are exacerbated as adolescents strive to realize their sense of identity, popularity, power, and place (Hunt-Anderson, 2017, 2021). In tandem with Horton (2011), culturally bound peer differences complicate the quality of peer relations which are promulgated through the social inequities and injustices assigned by in- and -out peer groups that incorporate post-colonial, popular and modern symbols and codes from the larger society (Horton, 2011; Khosropour & Walsh, 2001; Kruger, 2011; Phoenix, 1998; Reid et al., 2004; Teräsahjo & Salmivalli, 2003). Aligned with other studies, these historic, socio-cultural symbols and codes are commonly related to SES; race; colour (Miller, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Sherlock & Bennett, 1998); gender or sexual prowess (Stein, 1995); and religion, appearance, and residential location (Williams, 2008). The group processing of socio-cultural peer differences ultimately results in outcomes of rejection, exclusion, or some form of aggression

(Hunt-Anderson, 2017, 2021). Hunt-Anderson's findings also support those of Pottinger and Gordon Stair (2009) that the most common and adverse impact on victims are low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression; and fear or disinterest in school (Craig & Pepler, 2003; Hunt-Anderson, 2017, 2021; Rigby, 2003). Student narratives also underline the connections between bullying and the local context of systemic or ecological systems outlined in Bronfenbrenner's eco-developmental model (BEM). The implications from these findings clearly show the need for developing a holistic ecological school program (with national support) that is not only sensitized to the psycho-social needs of developing adolescents throughout the high school years, but will simultaneously mediate the bullying culture through the process of decolonization and reculturation (CPP Model) of symbols and norms (SI) and transformation of the school state.

Recommendations

Promoting Anti-Bullying Socio-Cultural Transformation

Guided by the findings in the qualitative narratives in Hunt-Anderson (2017, 2021), Hunt-Anderson & Shannon-Baker (2023), and varied contexts of Jamaican schools, the implications and recommendations highlighted below propose a combined multi-faceted framework of possible strategies, policies, and programs to re-culturate and mitigate the covert bullying regime in local high school communities. The implications also propose ways of enhancing the self-esteem and efficacy requirements of developing adolescents as individuals while also enacting a transformational agenda to promote equality, social justice, and positive cultural change in these school communities. The recommendations here reflect the voice of students, including those who felt victimized as observers.

Guided by the theoretical framework, the implications based on the BEM also focus attention on the physical and psycho-social needs of the developing adolescent and mediation within the interactive layers of the ecological systems (meso, exo, macro, and chrono), with stakeholders that influence adolescents during their tenure

of high school. Simultaneously, the implications incorporate the CPP theory that focuses on the reculturation and re-colonization of the school context and spaces (i.e., peer groups, classrooms, and administration) that influence behaviours and inter-relations. The overarching SI theory also provides considerations related to the individual adolescent's emotions and behaviours as well as group structures, school culture, and curriculum. Findings with implications and recommendations are summarized in Table 1.

Macro Level

National Support Systems and Anti-bullying Campaigns. The larger society and its historical and sociocultural factors and influences are a prominent part of the findings. The findings showed that bullying is perceived as a cultural norm; and, to a lesser extent as just "joking", despite its negative impact on victims. The theme, "Bullying situations in schools" is underpinned by peer groups' adaptation of the overarching society's historic socio-cultural and popular symbols, norms and values that prescribe differences among themselves. The consequence is acceptance or non-acceptance of others. These discriminating symbols and values are commonly related to money, social class, hair type, hair length, skin tone, residential location, morality, physical appearance, and genderization. Genderization was pervasive in the study and refers to what is perceived as acceptable male and female identities and their roles thereof. This includes expectations of female sexual conformity and male sexual prowess/machoism. Sexual orientations that challenge those normed identities and behaviours in any way are therefore deemed non-conforming and unacceptable (e.g., gay, homosexuality, refusal to comply) and warrant rejection, exclusion, cruel labelling, and sexual aggression.

Since school communities and bullying practices are influenced by the socio-cultural norms, symbols, and values of the larger society, preventative measures and cultural transformational programs are strongly implicated at the national level. These may

Table 1

Implications for Socio-Cultural Transformation in Schools

- Promotes equity, social justice and socio-cultural transformation (Transformational Paradigm/TP)
- Promotes positive self-esteem, efficacy & welfare of developing adolescents
- (Symbolic Interactionism/SI & Bronfenbrenner's Eco-Developmental Model/BEM)
- Re-culturalization & de-colonization of school community spaces & symbols (Critical Pedagogy of Place/CPP & SI)

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS <i>Hunt-Anderson (2017, 2021)</i> MACRO LEVEL	PREVENTION & INTERVENTION	CRONO LEVEL
Bullying is perceived as a cultural norm and to a lesser extent as just "joking" despite its negative impact. Bullying situations in schools are undergirded by students' adaptation of the larger society's historic, socio-cultural and modern symbols, norms and values that dictate "acceptance" or "non-acceptance" of persons. Bullying facilitating socio-cultural symbols are tied to money, social class, hair type, hair length, skin tone, residential location, physical appearance, and genderized behaviors and images such as sexual orientation (homosexuality) and female sexual conformity and male sexual prowess/machoism and aggression.	Harness intervention & prevention measures and support systems via the society and government and relevant communities and churches: Nationwide anti-bullying campaigns -vocal and visual support bringing public awareness of how bullying is defined and its negative outcomes on targets. Promote the national diversity & inclusion motto "Out of many, one people" - government and ministries of education & justice via e.g., billboards, interviews, publications, social media messages. Societal-school partnerships to provide socio-emotional support, conflict management training, and resource persons to promote social justice restorative processes (e.g., police force) and spiritual counsel that promote positive value systems and provide regular support (e.g., church support).	(Crono) High School Years Developing Adolescent: Identity vs Confusion (Erik Erikson, BEM)
ECO & MESO LEVELS		CRONO LEVEL
Student narratives also exposed teacher bullying (e.g., racial bias and discrimination), as well as teacher and administrative neglect and normalization of bullying incidents. Students voiced lack of confidence in parental involvement in bullying situations due to lack of sensitization and understanding of the consequences for the victim. Students further voiced their lack of confidence in the school administration, school counselors and teachers' ability to handle situations and lack of awareness. They consequently called for greater awareness and training to be implemented in schools.	Focus on teacher/parent/student sensitization via relationship-building & open cross-communication channels with students and their parents/guardians and communities • Teacher-parent-student meetings • Family "get to know" socials • Provide support as needed for parents/caregivers/family • Sensitize parents/caregivers and community & church leaders/members via bullying awareness seminars • Provide training workshops for parents/caregivers in development of emotional intelligence and affective skills Sensitize the written & hidden curriculum, & classroom environs and practices with positive socio-cultural symbols and practices tied to respect, inclusion and diversity that will help to re-culturate the school community. Install school-wide support through audible no-tolerance declarations and visible and focused awareness banners.	(Chrono) High School Years Developing Adolescent: Identity vs Confusion (Erik Erikson, BEM)

Table 1 continued

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS <i>Hunt-Anderson (2017, 2021)</i>	PREVENTION & INTERVENTION	CRONO LEVEL
MICRO LEVEL		
Students perceive bullying as a cultural norm/practice adapted from the larger society and to a lesser extent as just "joking". The victimized "left over effect" from bullying experiences left unaddressed in students' previous schools further intensifies the negative outcomes on victims. The most prevailing negative outcomes of bullying among adolescents are low self-esteem and struggles with depression and "feeling bad" about themselves. These are also associated with feelings of anxiety and fear of school, anger, and holding grudges. To a lesser extent, bystanders are also negatively affected by bullying incidents with peers. Students' narratives showed that the most common and effective coping mechanisms include peer friendships and strong peer support systems. Student participants voiced the lack of support from the school system and teachers and felt the need for raising awareness among teachers and the school in general.	Students must be fully engaged in information seminars and discussions and planning that aid the process of redefining bullying and its constructs before moving forward. New students and transitioning students into the school should be subject to psycho-social needs assessments to identify areas for support and counselling. Address issues related to social injustices and inequities via strategic restorative justice forums involving students and teachers. Strengthen adolescent self-efficacy & esteem through psycho-social training programs. Train and install strong trained peer group systems & role models to intercept negative peer groups, lend peer support, and peer counseling. Instill emotional intelligence seminars/ workshops to sensitize & train (e.g., conflict management) teachers, guidance counselors, & principals. Provide ongoing psychological support for teachers e.g., stress and conflict management. Raise awareness & student-led support via discrete (e.g., anonymous support phonelines) & "blatant" systems, clubs, & events (student-led). Administer teacher psychometric assessments and ongoing evaluations of teachers from both supervisors and students.	(Crono) High School Years Developing Adolescent: Identity vs Confusion (Erik Erikson, BEM)

involve devising educational policies, programs, events, and movements that raise awareness nationally and mobilize positive changes throughout the educational system and country at large. The literature shows that whole school efforts (e.g., the Bildung-Psychology model) that include national support have had the greatest success (McGuckin & Minton, 2013). National support systems would include, but are not limited to, forming partnerships with the Ministry of Education, child advocacy organizations and groups, anti-violence programs and personnel, and soliciting government aid where necessary. As an example, a multi-pronged information program with different resource personnel disseminating information across multiple sites (e.g., schools, communities, community centres, churches) could be taken to inform students of their rights to safety and the consequences of bullying, especially cyber-bullying.

Meso Level

Student narratives exposed teacher bullying (e.g., racial bias and discrimination), as well as teacher and administrative neglect and normalization of bullying incidents. Students expressed lack of confidence in the school administration and highlighted the lack of awareness and inability to handle situations displayed by school counsellors and teachers. Students consequently called for greater awareness, sensitivity training, and support systems to be implemented in their schools. Further, students were also insecure about "telling" and involving parents in bullying situations, mainly because of parents' lack of understanding of the after-consequences on the victim. Therefore, incorporating parental programs that sensitize and give parents guidance on how to handle bullying situations involving their children is necessary. Relationship-building

between teachers, students, and their parents is also implicated since lack of trust and confidence are part of students' concerns.

Relationship-building. Schools will need to focus on ongoing nurturing cross-exchanges and relationship-building with persons who might have direct influence on the adolescent's life. In addition to regular parent-teacher-student seminars, teacher-teacher consults are important in getting to know a student. Family-oriented "get to know us" school socials also facilitate relaxed interactions between a student's teachers, parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family, and close friends. Open lines of positive cross-communication with influential persons in a student's life will engender a sense of support and trust for the developing adolescent. Teachers and counsellors, where necessary, should ensure that parents or caregivers are given access to the support they need. Some school contexts may also require that school leaders form relationships with community and church leaders (meso level) to garner insights about students and obtain adequate support.

Sensitization and Training. Sensitization seminars to inform parents, family, caregivers, community leaders, and church leaders about bullying are important. Students should be active participants in developing and delivering these seminars, since narratives explicated that adolescents prefer to solicit the aid of other students of the same age group who they can relate to. Training workshops for parents and caregivers (similar to those for teachers and principals) are important in helping to develop emotional intelligence and affective skills. The Insights into Children's Temperament program/INSIGHTS (Cook & Lipps, 2020) is instructive. This program focuses on helping adults to identify and understand how to appreciate each child's unique disposition, while nurturing their self-esteem and efficacy and enhancing the parent-child relationship and climate at home. Seminars and workshops will further provide insights into parental needs, to ensure the necessary support, guidance, and training for parents and caregivers. Where possible, parents and caregivers should also be encouraged to meet (without hovering)

the friends and key persons in their children's lives outside of the home, such as church or youth mentors, community leaders or members, and neighbours.

Eco Level

Sensitization, Training, and Relationship-building. Indirect influences such as changes in an adolescent's home life (e.g., parental separation, death of a loved one, change of home, or church baptism) or school life (exam, change of classroom, or position in class) may also affect their emotional state and functionality. Relationship-building with students, parents, and caregivers will help to uncover situations and gain insight into adolescents' situations so that support or understanding may be actively given. Teachers will therefore need to be cognizant of students' attitudes and behaviours. Teacher sensitization and training in adolescent development will help in this regard.

Micro Level

All key influential persons within the adolescent's space must be properly informed and trained where necessary (such as family, school peers, and teachers). The quality of proximal processes at this level (e.g., mentors, teachers' behaviours) plays an important role in influencing the individual's emotions, meaning-making, and behaviours.

Re-defining Bullying and Raising Awareness. Hunt-Anderson's (2017, 2021) findings showed that covert bullying forms are normal cultural practices despite students' awareness of the negative impact. For instance, students in the study perceived bullying as a cultural prosocial tool derived from the larger society for gaining leadership, popularity, and power. Participants suggested programs to raise awareness and sensitize teachers. However, Williams (2008, p. 7) stipulates that the problem must first, "be defined and understood in the same way by all parties" for it to be addressed effectively. This suggests that the sociocultural symbols, norms, and features of covert and normalized bullying and its impact will need to be discussed and clarified by students,

teachers, administrators, and parents so as to reach common understandings. This re-defining process will require interactive seminars and discussions that include the voice of students who have been exposed as perpetrators, victims, and bystanders.

Teacher Sensitization and Training. The findings illuminated teachers' and administrators' displays of insensitivity, along with different forms of bullying accommodation, discrimination, and aggression towards students in the classroom. Students also expressed a general lack of confidence in their teachers, guidance counsellors, and their school. Student participants suggested training teachers to sensitize and guide them in how to adequately address bullying situations. Workshops, monitoring, and support systems for teachers would need to be incorporated at school level. Training workshops and seminars should focus on raising awareness of the covert bullying dynamics and its impact on victims, in relation to both teacher and peer bullying (definition, constructs, displays, and impact on students). This is in keeping with the finding that teachers and students have normalized many forms of bullying as cultural practices and are sensitive to the adverse, long-term psychological impact that these forms may have on victims. Workshops, for instance, would also need to sensitize teachers about what is regarded as bias and discrimination (which is demeaning and inappropriate in a classroom setting), and further establish new positive inclusive practices, norms, and values. Additionally, pre-service teacher education should incorporate bullying and mitigation training.

The implications from student narratives are also that teachers should have regular psychometric evaluations to determine their attitudes and beliefs. The findings also suggest that teachers and administrators should be subject to regular student evaluation. This would help to detect teachers' tendencies towards insensitivity, discrimination, or aggression. Furthermore, in order to enhance and sustain the improvements made through the in-service programs, psychometric evaluations could be a pre-requisite for acceptance to teacher training programs.

Improving the teaching atmosphere and promoting transformation requires ongoing training focussed on building teachers' emotional intelligence, affective skills, and conflict management skills. The emotional and affective aspects include cultivating strong moral, psychological, and social codes such as extending kindness, compassion, listening, respect, tolerance and fairness in teachers' behaviours and attitudes; and promoting a sense of inclusion and national unity in support of Jamaica's motto, "Out of many, one people". Student narratives strongly imply that high school teachers should be sensitized to the adolescent stages of development to fully appreciate the physical, and psycho-social changes that they experience.

Individual Psychosocial Support. Hunt-Anderson's findings (2017, 2021) revealed that anyone is susceptible to bullying and victimization as long as, difference or non-conformity is perceived in peer groups and interactions. There is no specific victim profile, although resilience is a factor in helping victims to cope. Low self-esteem, anxiety and depression are the most common outcomes of victimization, despite resilience. The findings also revealed that adolescents' stage of development (identity vs confusion, based on Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development) drives their need for self-affirmation and popularity (SI) and subsequent affiliation with popularized leaders and peer groups that engage in bullying activities. In addition, despite student victims' resilience, the "left over effect" derived from former, unresolved bullying incidents, increases sensitivity to similar subsequent incidents; exacerbated by lack of trust in teachers and the status quo (Hunt-Anderson, 2021).

Psychological needs assessments for students should therefore be an important part of matriculation into high schools, followed by regular evaluations throughout the high school years. Great attention needs to be paid to ensure that marginalized individuals are given the necessary professional support and counselling needed. Simultaneously, psychological experts, trained teachers and counsellors should run workshops to train and develop students'

psychosocial skills in extending support for their peers and handling bullying situations and their impact.

On the other hand, teachers and parents (Meso level) will also need to be sensitized and trained to develop their emotional intelligence and affective skills (e.g., the INSIGHTS program (Cook & Lipps, 2020) is instructive) that ultimately will nurture students' sense of self-esteem and efficacy. These measures will help to enhance the quality of proximal processes and climate at both school and home (Meso Level) (e.g., inculcating trust, caring, listening, and respect).

Peer Support Systems. Hunt-Anderson's (2021) findings showed that in local school contexts, peer groups that facilitate bullying mirror a blend of historical, post-colonial, and modern cultures of the larger society. Peer groups inculcate symbols and norms from the larger society to appropriate meaning-making and differences that influence their aggressions and social relations. Williams and Dingwall (2014) and Blumer (1986) propose that, if symbolic structures and symbols among interacting actors can be identified, then the prospect of modification to reconstruct meanings and actions can be examined. Strategies will therefore need to focus on simultaneously dismantling or intercepting negative peer group structures and processes to mediate symbols and norms related to deviance, rejection, exclusion, and genderized norms; while inculcating symbols of acceptance of diversity, tolerance, inclusion, and respect. Students should play a large role in devising and implementing effective strategies to decolonize (CPP model) these peer groups. Student narratives revealed that strong peer support systems are needed in schools. Students voiced that peer groups in their schools are usually political, untrained, and more image-invested than supportive.

Peer support systems should therefore be subject to a formal democratic process of careful screening and selection, with subsequent on-going training and monitoring in resolving conflict, maintaining peace-keeping, and deploying social justice symbols and norms such as engendering equal voice, acceptance, fairness, inclusion,

and respect. The Jamaican Change from Within program would be helpful in this effort. Strong, positive, peer support systems and role models could strategically intercept and mitigate the power of group leaders and group processes (Salmivalli, 2010). Students also suggested that friends and bystanders could be trained to lend support and mediate bullying situations. Positive role models, mentors, and student leaders must also be able to invoke positive symbols for popularity and inclusion, and lead the development of positive socio-cultural trends for other youth.

School Curricular, Culture, and Climate.

Schools will need to focus on a program of reculturizing and decolonizing the school community, classroom, and climate (based on the CPP model). This would involve, among other things, inculcating positive symbols and behaviours that convey equity and fairness, inclusion, tolerance, and respect. In addition to teachers' and administrators' indiscretions, narratives implicated the general lack of awareness, rigor, and policies to effectively address bullying in schools and impart a culture of trust, support, and security. Support will therefore be necessary through both the written and hidden curricula and culture.

Strong anti-bullying policies should, however, be developed with the input of students and teachers in a handbook that is made available to all staff and students for reference and guidance about what is acceptable. The curriculum of positive norms and values such as respect, listening to others, and inclusion should be conveyed through classroom interactions and teachers' attitudes and behaviours towards students who would normally be targeted as different. The hope is that, by raising awareness and sensitizing and training teachers towards inculcating and conveying positive symbols in their daily classroom operations, the gap in these differences will eventually be minimized.

Given the sensitive nature of bullying and the adolescent stages of development, however, support systems should also be made both strategically subtle and strong/blatant. Subtle systems may give students access to anonymous

hot phone lines that offer discrete emotional outlets and support; while strong support is blatant and visible. Blatant antibullying campaigns may include regular vocalizations of antibullying policies by principals or school leaders in school assemblies, student councils or gatherings; antibullying posters signed by students; statements and banners displayed on the school campus; the establishment of diversity and equity clubs; and hosting of school events that promote the same — all designed, organized, and promoted by students to inculcate a climate of diversity and acceptance.

School Leadership. No cultural change effort can be mobilized and effective without the blessings and quality leadership of school leaders — principals in particular at this level. Although the ultimate aims may differ, partnering with organisations such as the Jamaican Change from Within (CFW) program can provide insights and support, particularly as it relates to addressing anti-social and violence-related behaviors and the incorporation of restorative justice strategies for conflict resolution (Ferguson, 2019; Ferguson & Chevannes, 2018). The CFW's program also takes a whole school approach that focuses on promoting the positive development of students' self-esteem and nurturing the environment through strong leadership that includes principals and students (Chevannes, 2006). Many of the victimized in this research were high performers despite their low self-esteem and efficacy. This article has adapted the BEM model with a whole-school, ecological approach aimed at mediating the bullying regimen while promoting social justice and transformation within high school communities. The hope is to simultaneously nurture adolescents' sense of place and self-esteem by reculturizing school spaces and environs.

The Chrono System

For purposes of this study, it is intended that throughout the span of an adolescent's life in high school (Chrono), the systemic socio-cultural strategies instituted across the 4 systems (micro, meso, eco, and macro) will interact with each other and cultivate positive developmental and

socio-cultural changes and behaviours in both the individual and school state.

Conclusion

This article highlighted the findings from a qualitative thesis of covert bullying among Jamaican high school students. Supported by the CPP theory, the findings showed that socio-cultural differences were amplified within diverse school spaces and promoted a culture of bullying practices across various peer group structures. Implications based on the findings and theoretical framework were subsequently used to provide a framework of recommendations for the development of anti-bullying policies and programs to drive the enactment of decolonization and reculturization of school curriculums and spaces. Guided by the BEM and SI model, the recommendations also considered ways of establishing positive symbols and practices at the various ecological levels to forge a greater sense of inclusion, equity, and social justice within school communities while mitigating socio-cultural differences.

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