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### Bullying Is Everywhere: Ten Universal Truths About Bullying As A Social Process In Schools & Communities

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This article outlines a proposal to see schools as the natural portal of entry into community violence and to conceptualize bullying as a universal dysfunctional social process, in which the bully and the victim are symptoms, not causes of that dysfunction. Ten truths that we have found are crosscultural, and deserve consideration if such an approach is to become a practical reality in our struggles against community violence. These are: (1) Children need clear, consistent signals from home and school; (2) biology transcends culture; (3) schools mirror their communities; (4) bullying is a process, not a person; (5) when adults deny problems, children become targets; (6) children are developmentally similar across cultures; (7) all schools have a climate; (8) children need to feel safe to learn; (9) when children feel securely attached and valued, they grow; and (10) natural leaders and altruism are necessary for school and community change.

With rare exceptions, violence involves more than interpersonal conflict between two people or groups. It is the result of a complex, large-group, unconscious process (Gilligan, 1996, 2001; Volkan, 1997, 2002, 2004, 2006; Sklarew, Twemlow, and Wilkerson, 2004), as many articles in this volume illustrate. Dissecting the differences and getting a rich review of the details of the bullying phenomenon usually comes, as it does here, from psychoanalytic reflection. Although Freud was aware of the role culture played in the shaping of individual defenses against instincts, modern psychoanalytic research has developed a powerful role for the "trained conscious mind" in what are called cognitive behavioral approaches (Beck, 1979). Today, social skills training and the therapeutic role of the conscious mind are well established, and have helped modern analysts create for themselves a more balanced view of the power of the unconscious and conscious mind under the guidance of the ultimate etiological agent—the thinking thing—the brain itself, in "correcting" disturbed thinking.

Bullying is not a disease of individuals, but, instead, a symptom of a social process gone wrong. As an introduction to this critically important group of articles, we review ten universal truths about school violence in general, as well as bullying, that will give a useful and practical global context for the mental health professional interested in reducing violence and creating peaceful schools and communities. A number of articles in this volume illustrate how the bullying process is not confined to schools alone; workplace bullying has been recognized in Australia as a major public health concern, and is beginning to be seen that way in the United States. Many institutions are based on a bullying power dynamic that often unconsciously drives prejudices

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like racism, sexism, religious extremism, and other serious problems. In our country, we have, at times, institutionalized bullying in our drive for economic plenty at the cost of quality of life. We have "normalized" bullying in private clubs, blacklisting by unions, hazing in universities, and excommunication in churches. The shocking daily display of the brutal bullying of the Enron organization was not only remarkable, but also very embarrassing to many of us. We have focused our efforts on the school bully, we hope as just a beginning. Etymologically, the rather awkward term *bully* originally applied to a swashbuckling ruffian who protected the weak. Today, the bully is often characterized as a psychopathic monster. The bully is neither of these characterizations (Twemlow and Harvey, 2010); he or she is all of us, fair and square, and personal and group work is thus crucial for social change.

### TRUTH I: ADULTS NEED TO SEND THE SAME SIGNAL TO YOUTH FROM HOME AND SCHOOL

The adults in a child's life need to be on the same page: in control, protective, and offering guidance and direction to the child. It is unhealthy to have conflicts existing between the home and school, regardless of where they are located in the world. This concept is based on creating mentalizing social systems (Twemlow, Fonagy, and Sacco, 2005a, 2005b) that foster reflectiveness, focus on the best interests of the child, and are, by their nature, nonviolent.

There is one striking, but not uncommon, process that occurs in schools throughout the world. If an adversarial struggle develops between home and school, the problem is usually solved by acrimonious transfer to another school, institution, or home. This, of course, solves nothing, and the problem is often repeated at the new location. To solve such problems requires the home and school to get on the same page regarding the child's abilities and limitations, and to create an open and self-reflective dialogue with the child's best interests as a primary guiding principle. Affluent schools and urban, disadvantaged schools have a group dynamic that is fundamentally different. In disadvantaged schools, the students are more likely back each other up and share a dislike for the teachers who represent an authority system that they are fundamentally opposed to and often feel the victim of. Urban school students often support each other and hate the teachers.

The urban student is at risk of becoming recruited by a street gang that promises what every student or youth wants: to survive, and have money, protection, and power. The gang provides that, demanding absolute loyalty and initiation rituals that often involve serious physical conflict. When a school system, a family, or a community abdicate their responsibility to provide a sense of safety similar to that created by the gang, then gangs and cliques will naturally emerge and dominate school life.

Affluent schools, on the other hand, often overemphasize academic performance and can be seen as experiencing a problem of being obsessed with achieving excellence at all costs and with little regard for the psychological impact of pressure on developing children. Children in such schools want to please the teachers and fight to socially dominate each other, resulting in a competitive and unpleasant dynamic between children, involving vicious mean gossip and rumor mongering at a greater intensity than in lower-socioeconomic-school settings. This can also

be reflected in gross malfunction within the school that has high academic standing and none of the regular trappings of violence. For example, a high school with a very large population of students and an extremely high grade point average in the senior class had a class of students who, if accepted into good state-run schools but not into the Ivy League schools, would hide it for fear

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of being teased and victimized. One such child who had failed to get an A, but only an A- in one subject, had attempted suicide for fear of her parent's recriminations, and in a family therapy session she tearfully told her father that she just sat a test and got 95%, which gave her a full A. His response was, "You would have got 98% if you had done what I told you." A wealthy family packed up in one day at the behest of father and went down to New Orleans right after hurricane Katrina to do good works for the community: to donate money, to serve in food lines, to give medical assistance where possible because the father was a physician, only to find utter chaos, gunfire, and extreme danger. The family had failed to make even a rudimentary investigation of what the actual situation was and acted, instead, on a theoretical idea of doing good. In the upper socio-economic scales, then, similar problems exist; they just have different external forms. Such parents often spend little time with their children and, instead, spend money on expensive nannies and exhausting after-school activities. The following excerpts from a 12th-grade child's description of his day in an affluent US school illustrate the point:

6.30am: He starts by saying: "I wake up thinking about the 18-hour day ahead of me before I return home. I know this is going to be a long day, but I enjoy keeping busy, and the more I concentrate on my task, the quicker the day will seem. ..."

7.15am: Then he says "I am warming up for the early bird orchestra [refers to three students going to famous music schools] and much is expected of me."

8.15am through 11.40am: He runs from one demanding class to another aware of the need to be outstanding. Then he eats "on the run" to fulfill his class duties.

12.25pm: He attends a difficult class, aware of two competitors who are "going to Harvard next year."

6.30pm: He needs to rush home to eat dinner and prepare "for my dress rehearsal."

8pm: Back home getting ready for his church group and then back at 9pm, facing 4 hours of homework. He says "Hopefully I can finish by midnight so I can get some sleep before tomorrow's classes."

Children feel uncared for and insecure, caught up in the hysteria of the problem of excellence, as the first sentence indicates. This can generate tremendous amounts of shame and may become a causal link in the suicidal chain of thinking for vulnerable students. If questioned directly about this, the boy would probably be outraged by such an interpretation, because his habit patterns and values are learned from family and school, and are highly idealized

An interesting example from animal research suggests a need to ameliorate excellence with diversity even with animals: An animal biologist (Wilson, 2007) selected excellent laying chickens and compared their performance when separated off from the good egg-laying, but diverse, flock. The results surprised the authors; the high laying hens had virtually stopped producing and were featherless from vicious attacks on each other. The diverse flock were healthy happy and productive, with all their feathers!!!

What do home, school, and community have to do—irrespective of country or culture? They have to value and model prosocial behavior and communicate clearly and regularly with each other so that the child receives a consistent signal. They have to discourage grossly competitive behavior and promote mentalizing. Children from any country need direction. Children require a clear signal that shows them how to live and behave so that learning can take place. This is true in every school in the world. When a child receives unclear messages and adults fail to model self-reflective behavior, the child does not know how to behave and violence often results. Parents need to support the school and not get pulled into power struggles against the school. The child

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always suffers and becomes unable to self-regulate. They have to refocus motivation and attitude and make the child's home and school a primary secure base where the child feels safe to learn and live. Not one of these actions is expensive or very time consuming, but each does require time and knowledge of psychology and psychoanalysis.

## TRUTH 2: BIOLOGY TRANSCENDS CULTURE BUT NOT THE NEED FOR DIVERSITY

The question of nature versus nurture in determining psychopathology has yet to be resolved, despite what seems like eons of debate. Although space does not permit a full evaluation of this issue, it has become clear that diagnosis—as well as treatment—is constructed through the prism of culture.

How does biology transcend culture? There are a group of neurodevelopmental disorders that do transcend cultures, including Autism, dyslexia, and what many term schizophrenia, although the incidence of the latter diagnosis is more variable across cultures. Such a diagnosis is the same in Russia as it is in Australia. Regardless, the management of these disorders often varies across culture. Moreover, those children who have been reared in traumatizing environments are often left at sea without adequate ways of containing and managing this experience, and coping with new developmental demands. Such socially different children are often the targets of victimization and bullying by individuals and groups that may create a mean, unpleasant, and damagingly traumatizing atmosphere for such individuals.

To illustrate these principles and provide a successful strategy for intervention, we summarize our research in an urban All Age School in Jamaica. Many of the children were grossly deprived of nourishment, and lived in homes with significant sexual and physical abuse. These children came to school appearing stunned. We used an approach based on attachment theory with a melding of encouraging mentalization and managing power dynamics in the school (Twemlow et al., 2011). The children had been also physically disciplined by teachers who believed in corporal punishment. The situation was further aggravated because a group of 7th–9th graders who had failed an academic 6th-grade streaming examination were collected from six schools and sent to our school, which then had socially labeled as "dumb" those children who utilized bullying to dominate the atmosphere of the school.

The goal of this intervention was to create a very inexpensive process, adapted to the needs of the school, by creating a positive social role for the bullies in the form of bead-making and painting. The bullies were offered status as gentle warriors or helpful bystanders. We called them bead warriors who achieve their self-esteem from making bracelets, which they could then sell or give to friends. Using that atmosphere with psychoanalytically supervised local staff, the “bullies” developed an empathic way of looking at others and helping others, i.e., mentalizing, as was used in the CAPSLE study at Menninger Clinic (Fonagy et al., 2009). Little by little, this project shifted the bully from a coercive and traumatizing role in the school to a protective, gentle warrior role. These bead warriors took care of children, even protecting them on the way home from school. Teachers then saw these children as “more lovable.”

Feeling attached to the child and having a child feel valued, loved, and appreciated by staff members helped the students emerge from a withdrawn, stunned, traumatized state into becoming *intentional*. That is, they began to feel as though they could act in a way that took care of others (altruistic), without appearing weak or opposing the bully-leader, who was himself changing. Fear

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of appearing weak is a common social reaction in violent cultures, and helping others is often seen as a manifestation of weakness. But once the group took up the banner of helping, rather than harming and traumatizing, this new view spread through the school like wildfire and eventually changed the climate of the school. This process was aided by psychoanalytic consultants who did not adopt a prominent expert role, but functioned in the background, gently facilitating awareness that the social process was moving from a bully-led culture to a designated leader-led culture. Teachers often requested a few extra sessions of bead making and painting prior to academic testing, because it settled the children down so well. This model school now has many teachers wanting to work there, and the government has created a brand new location for this school. We hope that this process will then spread to other schools in the country.

Trauma is also an environmentally rooted cause of problem behavior at school; this is also a universal truth, but with a program adapted to the needs of the culture a new social role can be given to the children and the lasting effects of the trauma can be reversed.

Children with more severe neurodevelopmental issues, such as autism, epilepsy, and intellectual disability, need to be given a role in the school environment that does not result in their neediness making them “sitting ducks” for victimization. There is a natural tendency for affluent cultures to simply exclude disturbed children in an unconscious effort to “purify” their culture. Briefly, we engaged in one such intervention at the request of the village manager and trustees: We found a community where, as usual, real estate prices were high, property crimes were high, and violent crimes were very low, a typical pattern in such “non-diverse” communities (Twemlow & Sacco, 2007 pp. 252–253). The school system had 2% primarily Korean minorities, the sons and daughters of wealthy businessmen in the community. Without any conscious decision, the community had excluded all defective children, and there were no facilities for managing learning disabilities or developmental or behavioral disorders. All such children transferred to other cities for schooling. So the city had excluded diversity, and while, at the time, they didn't accept our suggestions for changing toward a mixed and diverse population (we suggested there would be serious problems if they did not alter their approach to bullying in schools), they did have a serious problem that, 3 years later, attracted international news. An episode ensued involving the bullying of girls at a football rally using buckets of animal entrails by students who got drunk with alcohol supplied by a mother. So, for biology to truly transcend culture, the culture must adapt and give useful social roles to those who have a variety of serious and developmental defects.

### TRUTH 3: SCHOOLS MIRROR THE VALUES OF THE COMMUNITY THEY SERVE

The principal theme running through this article is that there is a necessity for an intimate connection between schools and the communities. In Boston, Massachusetts, busing students from African American neighborhoods to primarily White areas was an experiment that turned violent. The idea was sound, ethnic integration, but it ended up making community schools a thing of the past. Children were not from the communities in which they were taught and the schools and communities got even further apart. Problems in schools have been handled in a variety of ways in different countries. Some have created public, parochial, charter, and private school systems. The affluent often send their children to privately funded schools. Home schooling has become a flexible option in the United States for parents who feel that no school is a really satisfactory place for their child to be educated. Interestingly, such home school systems are becoming like

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public schools, where parents share social and sports activities with each other in a block setting, for example, at a community center or park. Such children tend to be on the higher social economic scale because home schooling requires at least one parent to be at home.

When a parent sends a child to school, the parent may be involved with the school or detached from it. In the private school and parochial school systems, frequently parents are overinvolved with their children; in one parochial school, school security needed to escort a mother away from her girl each day. The mother had a mental illness that made it impossible for her to separate from her own child, and this caused many problems for the child, as well as for the mother and the school. On the other end of the spectrum, in ghetto schools, parents may be otherwise involved with chaos, imprisonment, and disease where schools are valued as a source of free babysitting. Attendance rates at PTO meetings are, thus, very poor. In our cross cultural work, the number of parents who come to PTO meetings has become an index of the success of an intervention. So, as the child becomes more intentional, feels more attached, and then begins to adopt gentle, rather than bullying, roles, parents become interested in these visible changes in their children, who appear to want to go to school. Increasing the school community connection is quite commonly done by involved children. The US culture tends to see children as recipients of the knowledge and wisdom of adults. Our experience has been that children are quite capable of changing adults and taking an initiative in that regard, ranging from the second-grade girl sent to me for disruptive school behavior, whose parents began fighting with each other while the initial interview was proceeding. She winked at me and left the room of her own accord. I spent time with the parents in marital therapy and never did see the girl again! Children often become so involved with what's going on in the school that it becomes a safe haven for them and parents then become more interested in why their child wants to go to school. In one such instance, a boy from a very disturbed family was usually first out of bed in the morning, got his own medications and got himself fed and off to school before any family member was awake. That mother eventually came into the school with the express purpose of wondering why, to her amazement, her child would want to come to school. She ended up in a parent-as-teacher program thoroughly involved with that school, developing a strong connection with the school and its staff. Parents will come if the school can present itself as a safe haven and offer an appealing experience. In other words, the school is a community program that requires and needs parental

involvement to be successful. Parents do not need to become teachers, but the school may become a place where parents can get help in assisting in the education of their children, and develop broader parenting skills, as well. There is an obvious role here for a school-based psychoanalyst, who facilitates the development of containing and holding environments, that are both developmentally appropriate (holding), and capable of containing rage and other scary emotions without overreaction (containing).

Although it would be desirable to have such interaction between home and school be painless, frequently law enforcement becomes a partner when there is a hostile work environment within the school setting. Although community police officers are quite common in the United States, as well as in many other countries, their presence not only ensures safety, but they may have a role in educating children about issues like drugs, and bullying. The question is: How much is this needed? John Devine's excellent book, *Maximum Security* (1996), illustrates an extraordinary situation in Bronx schools, which often begin their day with a 45-minute parade through metal detectors. School security officers have been elevated to the rank of police, doing sweeps through the school and providing all the school discipline. On Mondays and Fridays, the truancy rate is

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nearly 90%. Such schools essentially function more like a war zone, or a prison, and children who gain any educational experience from that school do so in an atmosphere of extreme danger.

Communities who remain outside of the school and do not engage with the school in the cocreation of a good learning environment are the ones that are not very functional, whether rich or poor. In the United States, teachers are poorly paid, overworked, and have low social status, thus their commitment to the process of teaching can falter. In many countries, teachers are given a much higher academic position and salary. It is in these ways that communities can mirror in schools what they value in themselves, although at times that mirror is somewhat foggy. The universal element here is that, rich or poor, schools reflect what the community values.

## TRUTH 4: BULLYING IS A PROCESS, NOT A PERSON

Bullying is a universal social process that pulls people into a social dynamic regardless of their geography, level of resource, or age. It is often an unconscious group process reflected in individuals, as well as small (school cliques) and large groups (schools). We elaborate on the details of this group phenomenon in Twemlow & Sacco (2011). In essence, the bully group covertly takes over leadership of the school. The designated leaders feel out of control and not themselves, by projective identification from the bully leadership group. The school is often thus caught up in a flight–fight basic assumption with crisis controlling the school and stop-gap Band-Aid decision making. This is frequent in lower socioeconomic-status schools, but was also evident at Columbine where the teachers were out of touch with the school climate and the White cap/Jocks bully group dominated school life.

The classic school-yard bully—commonly seen in middle schools as a big and dumb child, a boy usually, using his physical power to overwhelm those brighter than he—is really a thing of the past in the sophisticated research occurring with the bullying process throughout the school cycle into college. What is universal is that the power issues and power struggles are acted out in all schools both in adults and children. How much the behavior injures children and adults depends on what the school culture does with its climate, and controlling the bullying process.

The interaction of power with people is often unconscious or preconscious and when it becomes a struggle, it becomes conscious and a clear and obvious part of the interaction between people. Dominance hierarchies in animals reflect the need to have a leader, not unlike Machiavelli's description of the politics of the Princes and Popes of medieval Europe, five centuries ago. Wrangham & Wilson (2004), researched chimpanzees and suggest an intermale-dominance drive through and including human species, discussed in relation to gangs, where similar dominance hierarchies existed and Franz de Waal (1989) researched similar behavior in chimpanzees. Thus, dominance hierarchies are established in many animals including human cultures; the act of struggling with power may be universal in all primates. Humans have the additional dimension of being self-reflective or impulsive in the management of this power, and sometimes sadistic in the self-reflective pleasure in inflicting pain. They also have the drive to be altruistic, we and others believe, to counterbalance these destructive impulses (Shapiro & Gabbard, 1994, Twemlow, 2001).

The circle of power illustrates the four fundamental caveats of the interaction between victim, victimizer, and the surrounding audience of bystanders. What is very clear is that the audience of bystanders is part of the causal chain in the escalation of violence. If the audience is not present,

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actors have no incentive to act; if the audience is hostile, the actors also have less incentive to act, so that audience of bystanders have an immense and direct impact on how the power plays are acted out. The roles are cocreated. A victim has no role if there is no victimizer, although victimization may be a trigger for transference enactment. All people use power in a variety of ways and adopt the role of victim, victimizer, and bystander in the course of everyday life, but not necessarily in a way that would traumatize or even draw the attention of others. Bully, victim, and bystander are roles in a power dynamic, not diagnoses, and really have little, if anything, to do with psychopathology. The roles can become pathologically repeated when they become fixed. Then trouble begins, with compulsive repetition of patterns of response that don't solve the problem. For example, passive/aggressiveness is conflict avoidant. People get stuck in the sick role as a victim. Martyrs are victims for the sake of others. The role of being a helper of others is a common defense against the need for help oneself. If the power struggles are not managed by the school and community, then lethal violence may occur. For example, a chronically victimized child may end up committing suicide, as in the cases of Phoebe Prince, Carl Walker, and Tyler Clemente, or become an avenging victim (injustice collector), as in the case of the adolescent homicides in schools such as Columbine. Bullying thus is very much a process, not a person. It's a process that is quite controllable by the school and its members and by the community surrounding it.

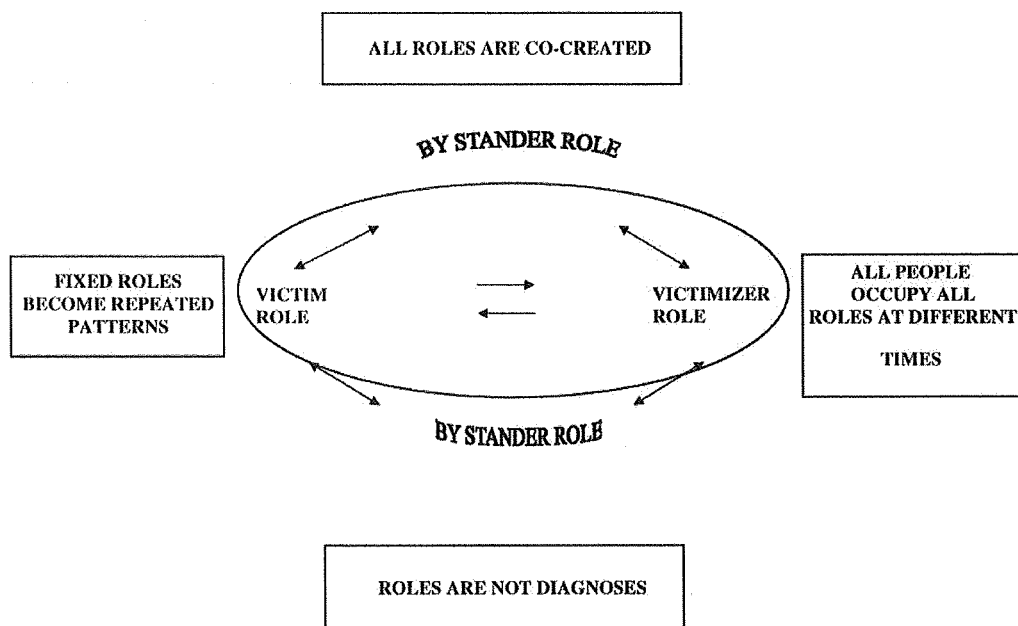
Solving this power dynamic does not require expelling a particular boy who is a victimizer, although that may become necessary if such a boy is clearly sadistic, without feelings for others (psychopathic). **Figure 1** depicts the unconscious power dynamics as a trialectic involving the bully, victim, and bystander. The majority of victimization in schools comes from nonbullies

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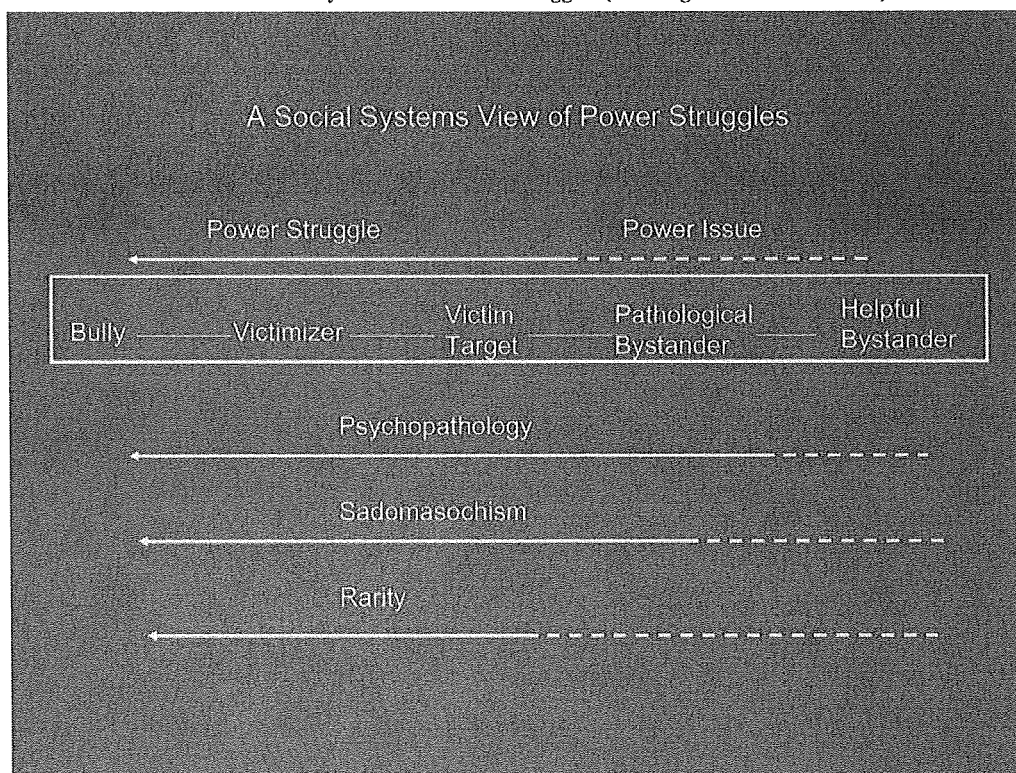
who become inadvertently and intermittently mean and unpleasant, but it may have an additive effect on vulnerable children, who are prone to being victims. **Figure 2** illustrates a continuum from always pathological sadistic bully to helpful bystander. The social interplay of these roles is obviously complex.

**FIGURE 1** Trialectic Models of Bully-Victim-Bystander.

**The Circle of Power**



**FIGURE 2** Social Systems and Power Struggles (color figure available online).



Aggressiveness is not an abnormal phenomenon. It's simply a part of normal upbringing and known as part of normal behavior in children. (This is especially true among first- and second-grade boys in the United States.) Most countries allow children to fight as part of their normal development. When one child is deliberately injured, the situation then becomes defined as violent. When the setting deteriorates and the victimizer repetitively victimizes, or several victimizers attack the same victim, the social system might inadvertently support the bullying process because it does not have a way of managing power as part of its overall climate-management strategy, so the bully dynamic will then reign over the school, the bully becomes a dictator of the school, often with an oblivious avoidant or abdicating staff, whose leadership role has

been displaced by the bully group. Such schools will never improve with mental health didactic programs alone, as research to date has shown (Twemlow & Sacco, 2008).

## TRUTH 5: TEACHERS & SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS HAVE PROBLEMS THEY DON'T WANT TO DISCUSS

All schools have *undiscussables*. What is an undiscussable? In our experience in a variety of social contexts, the undiscussable facts are the issues that would be a social embarrassment, not

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just to individuals but to the school as a whole. These problems can take many forms and are very difficult to manage. Obviously, the first step is that the school must be aware of and be willing to manage them in some way. Teachers who bully children or administrators or parents who bully teachers exists everywhere and is an universal undiscussable.

Research on teachers who bully students is rare, but points to the idea that it can only take one teacher to sour a school. Most teachers are focused professionals who care deeply about children. Nevertheless, they are still human and vulnerable to the misuse of their power and authority (Twemlow et al., 2006). This phenomenon is very hard to talk about for teachers, because teachers in many cultures like the United States have formed professional associations that function like labor unions and create a defensive adversarial system about teacher bullies and with powerful resistance to any implication that a teacher would bully a child, despite the fact that it happens all the time. A clinical case illustrates this point. A young boy, aged 8, complained to me that his teacher called him a girl's name in front of the class when no other grown-up was in the classroom. I knew this teacher and respected her and saw her as very unlikely to be a bullying teacher. The child made an audio tape and proved it to me during a session! Bullies are everywhere, and undiscussables exist in all social systems. Teachers and principals nearing retirement age are at risk of becoming apathetic and sometimes hostile to new ideas. They don't want to change, and won't support new programs, involving extra work or changing well-established patterns. Bully teachers may be senior faculty and may unduly impact younger teachers. This can become a huge problem, especially a single experienced teacher, whom younger teachers listen to because of seniority, who bad mouths a new approach. One such example occurred in a Midwest school about to adopt some new research findings about bullying. The teachers had devised and tested a way to implement the program at their school, but they suddenly lost complete interest in the project. A senior teacher had belittled the findings and let it be known that he thought the bullying problems could be much more easily managed by shortening recess and lunch times!

Parents bully teachers and may make use of attorneys in that process. It has become a significant problem within the school system in the United States. Similarly, the relationship between administrators and school boards and teachers is often openly antagonistic. In one school system, the superintendent regularly cussed out the principals of the schools who would meet with him each week for assessment. The bottom line with this type of issue is that such undiscussables must be brought out in the open before a school has any chance of changing, and the mental health professional with psychoanalytic skills can help to uncover unconscious conflict and denial in ways that don't threaten individuals socially. Without such efforts, we feel that entirely child-focused antiviolence programs are threatened. Teachers in the United States do not respond well to being treated as patients, but offering a confidential setting to discuss their problems can be of help. Groups of principals are central to this effort, because they obviously manage the problem directly. Any good principal knows which teachers are bullies and knows which students should not be placed with such teachers.

## TRUTH 6 : CHILDREN ARE DEVELOPMENTALLY SIMILAR ACROSS CULTURES

Clearly, psychological experience is immensely different from culture to culture, and so are child rearing practices. But certain developmental stages of children are cross-cultural in the true sense

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of the word, because they are linked to brain development. In many countries, teachers receive very little child development training. In the United States, elementary school education is behaviorally based. Teachers may develop a machine-like attitude toward children, viewing them as objects to manage, punish, reward, and reinforce. A teacher who lacks a background in child development, particularly brain development, may find it difficult to be able to teach in a way that is comprehensible to children and that treats them as living human beings. Any pre-school and kindergarten teacher knows that they have a parent-like role with children. Children will do anything to get the teacher's attention, both positive and negative. The role of teacher-as-parent shifts as children become more mature in the 6- to 12-year-old range. These emerging adolescents tend to develop peer leaders using more symbolic verbal skills. The work of Piaget (1930) and others have documented this in a truly cross-cultural way. The capacity to symbolize, rather than act out, aggression seems to develop with puberty and throughout the teenage years. At the same time, when the child becomes sexually mature under the influence of testosterone and estrogen, they become essentially agents of their limbic systems. The parent and teacher have to tolerate the extreme roles acted out by adolescent children in the process of searching for their identity. They may move from profound religious convert to obligatory atheist in the space of a few months. How their moral leanings are vastly impacted by peer group pressures! An adolescent will listen more closely to a peer than he or she will to an adult, even a loved parent. By the time the child is moving into the young adult years of 20-25, the capacity to inhibit (mentalize) some of these emotional impulses becomes more established and more automatic. So the task of the high school teacher and the pre-high school teacher is quite different. As children become more verbally proficient, the types of violence and bullying and victimization changes. Puberty signals a shift from physical to more nonverbal bullying, which is, in the long run, much more psychologically damaging.

There are differences of opinion within cultures about whether or not adolescence is a temporary illness on the way to adult life, or whether teenagers can emerge compliant and moral without this turmoil. Although that question has not yet been answered, contemporary adolescent behavior seems to be similar to the way it was in the days when Plato was writing his Utopian Republic: He suggested that the children be made wards of the state when they become teenagers just to relieve parents from the pain of raising them!

## TRUTH 7: ALL SCHOOLS HAVE A CLIMATE



Obviously, schools are social systems wherever they are. The idea of climate is a complex picture of the conscious and unconscious processes that affect the school. Not only the dynamics of the people in the school but also how the school is constructed and what the surrounding community is like. What are these dynamics? Psychodynamic approaches suggest that schools as social systems have preferred unconscious ways of functioning in relation to the leader. For example, the role of the leader in a school is usually assigned to the principal or headmaster with significant power to change how schools function. But often these leaders do not realize that there are fantasies and expectations of them that are unconscious even to teachers, students, administrative staff, parents, and volunteers who have these fantasies. One such adaptation of Bion's work by **Miller (1998)**, suggests that the leader embodies, unconsciously as part of his or her role, the protection of the group from its fears around issues of survival. For example, an assumption of

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the group might be that the leader is dependable, a natural assumption that a child will make of a caregiver. The expectation also is that the leader will create a safe, caring, nonhostile work environment. Second, another possible unconscious assumption could be that the leader is strong enough and quick enough to fight a clever enemy and protect the school. Such immediate enemies are typically political policy decisions to close schools, alter teacher benefits, threaten job security, and institute budget cuts. A third basic assumption about leadership involves whether the leader has created a line of succession so that a school would continue to exist after he or she leaves in a way compatible with the teachers and others who remain. These three assumptions are thought by Miller and others to represent survival and self-preservation functions as biogenetically programmed. If the school leader is not aware of these unconscious expectations, he or she can act in ways that obviously might cause major group disruption. Thus, a caveat may be made that adults are often in control of the school's physical and obvious social environment, but not the unconscious dynamics of that social system. The psychoanalytically-informed interventionist's role entails illuminating social and group dynamics; this consultation may become critical to the survival of a school.

## TRUTH 8: CHILDREN NEED TO FEEL SAFE TO LEARN

The availability of community assistance for children increases the feeling of safety in schools. Many studies (**Swearer et al., 2010**), have shown that children need to feel safe to be able to learn at all and have within themselves the feeling of safety and wellbeing (**Sandler, 1960**). Children need to be safe at home and feel safe at school. The school itself needs to be structured (again, an important psychoanalytic skill taught in consultancy) so that it can contain negative feelings by children without overreacting or underreacting to them. The psychoanalyst can help create schools that are sensitive to the developmental, social, and emotional needs of the children. The universal goal of school violence prevention is the building of this sense of children feeling safe that is not only a feeling of safety and well-being, but is part of an internal psychological representation of being safe within oneself. A student's relationship with a teacher is a core ingredient of feeling safe, and children need adults to help them manage aggressive peers in a nonaggressive and more peaceful way (**Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2002**). So the friendship link between adult and children is a very strong and obvious way of creating a safety net for children to be able to function optimally in academics.

## TRUTH 9: WHEN CHILDREN FEEL SECURELY ATTACHED AND VALUED, THEY GROW

If children are not securely attached, they do not grow. What, then, is meant by *securely attached*? Studies of infant development are just beginning. In the past ten years, the world has been flooded by literature on early infant-care giver relationships. Infancy is defined as a child less than one year of age. The advent of modern computers and the complexities of using them with children have enabled us to learn a great deal more about how a child's mind works. John **Bowlby (1973)** who, shortly after World War II studied children's responses when their caregivers were absent either through illness or at war, wrote several books for the World Health

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Organization on maternal attachment and loss, and he defined a condition he called *hospitalism*, which was the clear reaction of children who became depressed, apathetic, and regressed in the absence of their parents when hospitalized. It was not uncommon in those days for children to spend months in hospital during the epidemics of polio and rheumatic fever. He was able to very clearly see the attachment and the importance of the caregiver-child relationship to the way in which children develop and grow. Earlier, **Rene Spitz (1965)** worked with children directly orphaned through experiences in World War II and defined a condition of marasmus, essentially lack of love. Children in such orphanages had all their physical needs provided for, but had lain unattended in bassinets in rows; the children died through lack of human contact.

A modern leader in this field is a psychoanalyst, Peter Fonagy from the University College, London, who has focused his attention on a number of clinical entities, particularly borderline personality disorder, chosen because it is a fundamental disorder of insecure attachment (**Fonagy et al., 2002**). The primary symptom of a borderline individual is a feeling of emptiness or a fear of abandonment as if the threat of abandonment of loving and caring elements of human interaction promotes a deep regression to a very unstable and insecure early state of mind in that patient. Continuing research and observation of mothers and infants (**Fonagy, 2001**) and their interactions have shown that borderline mothers are not good at responding to the way their infants' needs are expressed nonverbally. They tend to misread how a child expresses his needs, not deliberately, but through unconscious traumas and lack of experience that same mother may have had very early in her own life.

This research has been shown to correlate highly with outcomes in later life, and out of it grew a concept of mentalization that Fonagy modernized and is essential for adequate human to human communication in its most basic sense. For example, in the student-teacher relationship there is a knower-ignorant interpersonal dynamic that can, and sometimes does, become a power struggle in the classroom. In the mentalizing relationship, the mentalizer is curious about the other person's mind, but recognizes its opacity to them. Only the mind being mentalized knows what is in that mind. Thus, many humble and respectful inquiries need to be made; there are five general areas. The first is the capacity to reflect. Although reflective functioning has been researched in depth and measured with sophisticated instrumentation, in its basic, simplest sense this refers to the capacity to think before acting with emotional awareness. To reflect on what you are going to do before you go to do it, and when you decide not to do it, you do so because of the potential impact.

The second element of mentalization is the capacity to empathize, or more exactly a double empathy. This involves the ability to have an accurate reading of what emotional states the other individual is in without knowing those states exactly. In other words, mentalization involves the capacity to pick up nonverbal and verbal cues that provide the observer with the capacity to understand the individual accurately. This

function requires the individual to also know themselves well, to be able to be aware of their own mental states, their ideas, their beliefs, their feelings and emotions. Their fantasies are part of a self-awareness that then promotes the capacity to be accurately aware of others. So a mentalizing person will convey to the individual being mentalized that they are understood, and understood in a way that's not intrusive, i.e., a curiosity and interest in the opaqueness of another person's mind. The third element of mentalization involves affect regulation. In the case of borderline personality disorder, the dominating state involves storms of affect that cause the individual to lose control of what they say and do and then later regret

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all of the things they have said and done, which have often led to further destructive actions. The state leads to a state of mindlessness, according to Fonagy, in which only physical events or objects have meaning to the borderline person, medications, a warm body often not a person one would choose, and then later deep regret when the dust settles and the individual returns to the capacity to reflect. So the ability to regulate feelings is an important part of the act of mentalizing.

The fourth element of mentalizing involves the ability to establish boundaries. Obviously, all of these elements are intertwined. One doesn't exactly precede the other. So, for example, to establish boundaries one must control affect, be capable of empathizing and reflecting. What are these boundaries? In borderline individuals who have poor early attachment experiences, often disorganized ones, the fear of themselves and their lack of sense of identity causes, in many ways, all individuals to be quite close to them because they are warm bodies whom they may have to attach themselves to, to avoid the highly destructive and scary feeling of disintegration or annihilation, so the boundaries of the self are broadly extended to include individuals whom the borderline personality patient does not know at all well. As the capacity to mentalize and improve as treatment aids the individual, these boundaries become more discreet so that the immediate self-boundary is personal intimacy and privacy followed by family and then close friends and acquaintances, social contacts, community members and so on. In other words, the boundaries are established so that intimacy is not based on merely being a warm body that will make the individual feel temporarily secure, but an individual with varying degrees of trust worthiness, and known with varying degrees of intimacy to the individual.

Finally, as part of mentalizing, the individual becomes self-agent. Self-agency really is an elaborate form of intentionality. The individual, when able to function in this way, can intend and it will happen, in a way that is not destructive to the personality. It is reflected upon. It is based upon adequate empathic communication. It is based upon control of affect and establishing boundaries. So, in the end, it then becomes a useful and healthy part of an individual's action on their own behalf. Self-agency then is action on one's own behalf, but in a way that does not cause destructiveness. An individual, for example, can perform a clever crime, but in the end, the criminal act itself is not evidence of self-agency.

So what does all this mean in understanding school violence? Mentalizing is an extremely important developmental step that is not fully developed until young adulthood, but can be developed through programs and frameworks with schools to assist children in overcoming and managing the immense emotionality fueled by the limbic system and sex hormones that can plague and yet help a young adolescent develop. We have been able to show, as others have, that the capacity to reflect and empathize can develop in younger children, especially if the social conditions demand it. Social conditions may exist in drug-ridden ghettos and also in affluent homes where there is insufficient contact with the parents and where the child really doesn't know his or her parents as well as he or she knows a nanny or baby sitter. This insecure attachment is by neglect and is very damaging to a child, perhaps even as damaging as sexual and physical abuse. And so we return to the title of this particular universal truth. If a child has a secure attachment base in a family that pays attention, the child will grow and become creative and productive. That base can be transferred to a school that similarly takes care of the social and emotional needs of the child as well as its academic needs. We and others have been able to show (Fonagy et al., 2005; Fonagy et al., 2009) that academic performance is linked to the capacity for children to feel securely attached in a peaceful learning environment.

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## TRUTH 10: NATURAL LEADERSHIP AND ALTRUISM ARE NECESSARY FOR CHANGE

Arguably the most controversial of these ten universal truths has emerged from the work we have done in evolving nations starved for resources. Here we find that the key to violence prevention is a natural leader who stands up for the school as a whole. In brief summary, natural leaders are everywhere. They are simply not recognized as leaders. Often they are called *natural helpers*, and in high schools *peer helpers*. These are people who do good for others without necessarily expecting some sort of award or accolade for what they do. They often don't see themselves as leaders; nor do they want to be identified as leaders. They lead by example. In some ways, they are an extension of the care-giving parent who models behavior that the child imitates. The work of Gergely & Cisbra (2006) suggests that imitation is a very important part of human learning that may extend well into adult life, perhaps much more extensively that we have recognized in the past. This sort of modeling, perhaps continuing the secure attachment pattern of the stable family, allows the natural helper to do a lot of things in a way that is compassionate, not self-seeking, and often involves far less coercive victimization and bullying than occurs in the case of more self-focused leaders who have narcissistic investments in being a leader.

How does altruism fit in with this concept? Taking care of one's sick or disturbed colleagues, or not destroying the enemy in a fight, has great survival value. Kin and reciprocal altruism are part of the field of evolutionary psychology (Twemlow, 2001). It certainly makes common sense that taking care of your family and community members helps the community, as a whole, survive. The value of the idea that an impulse to do this may be present in humans and the ways in which various programs and processes have reinvigorated that in school children is a suggestion that supporting goodness in people may help promote a sense of community or connection to others.

Psychology, in many ways, lacks a theory of virtue. We can see sexuality for its reproductive positive value and aggression, for its implied vim and vigor, enthusiasm, and energy, but they tend to be seen in a more negative way as the mental health professional uses them. Altruism as a drive/impulse provides an evolutionary anchor or foundation for sexuality and aggression that ensures that the continuity of the family remains intact, and the continuity of the community remains as a secure and stable working model. Schools, of course, are models for that and teachers as a professional group, who have adopted positive health psychology (Seligman, 1996), have much to teach the mental health professional in this two way learning process.

## CONCLUDING COMMENT



This incomplete list of "Universal truths" suggests a model for cross-cultural intervention into school violence using a psychoanalytically informed approach designed to create more settled schools and a safe productive learning environment for young people. While cultural differences are often unique & intriguing, similarities between children are more striking than their differences: we all have a mother, father, upbringing and basic physical similarities with presumably similar brain chemistry and plasticity. These truths could set the scene for a Global Strategy for managing and preventing violence and bullying everywhere if this model is extended to adults and the world at large.

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