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The Architecture of Exclusion: A Socio-Pedagogical Analysis of Mobbing Dynamics in Primary and Secondary Education

¹ Georgios Potamias, ² Symeon Nikolidakis

¹ PhD Pedagogy, School Principal, Cyprus

² PhD Sociology of Education, Special Teaching Staff, University of Limassol, Cyprus

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Corresponding Author: Symeon Nikolidakis

Abstract

School mobbing—characterized by collective, systematic, and prolonged peer exclusion—presents a critical challenge to both student well-being and institutional efficacy in primary and secondary education. While traditional research frequently conceptualizes bullying through an individualistic, psychological lens, this article proposes a comprehensive socio-pedagogical framework to decode the systemic "architecture of exclusion" that sustains mobbing dynamics. Sociologically, we examine how school mobbing operates not as isolated acts of deviance, but as a structured group phenomenon driven by peer socialization, relational power hierarchies, and institutional blind spots.

Pedagogically, the paper analyzes how classroom management styles, the hidden curriculum, and varying degrees of teacher agency can either inadvertently legitimize or actively dismantle these exclusionary structures. By bridging micro-sociological theories of group cohesion with critical pedagogical interventions, we argue that effective anti-mobbing strategies must shift from punitive, individual-focused reprimands toward systemic, relational transformations. Ultimately, this article offers educators, school administrators, and sociologists a holistic model to diagnose the structural roots of peer terror and foster democratic, inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: School Mobbing, Multimodality, Social Semiotics, Relational Sociology, Critical Pedagogy, Hidden Curriculum, Institutional Exclusion, Classroom Management, Inclusive Education

1. Introduction

Bullying in schools is increasingly recognized as a serious problem in today's society, constituting a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is difficult to define and evaluate accurately. The school is viewed as a social system that is interconnected with the social and moral principles that govern the broader social and cultural context and as a microcosm of society, it is a place of manifestation of behaviors where school violence is connected and interacts with the broader environment (Basina, 2022). In the international bibliography, Olweus (2007) states that bullying exists when a student is repeatedly exposed and for a sufficient period of time to negative actions of another or other students. However, the diversity in definitions is an indicator of the inherent complexity, as the phenomenon reflects a problem directly linked to the organizational and administrative parameters and the characteristics of the school as a social environment (Karanikola *et al.*, 2018). Victimization includes processes such as mobbing, in which a group of children systematically harasses a child, emphasizing the dynamics of social relationships (Karagianni, 2018). Indirect forms of psychological bullying, such as intentional exclusion, are particularly painful because they contribute to the destruction of social relationships and create a hostile environment that undermines the progress and all-round development of children (Sapouna, 2006).

The phenomenon of psychological bullying and emotional abuse, although old, has only been researched and openly discussed in recent decades. The name and definition of the phenomenon has been of decisive importance, equivalent to the name of a disease, which allows its diagnosis from the symptoms. The term mobbing was attributed to it and differs from the more widely known term bullying in the fact that it occurs in the workplace and more often involves psychological violence, while the latter occurs in the school environment and more often involves physical violence. There are other differences, however, both phenomena describe antisocial behaviors that appear in the adult or school life of the individual and must be treated, so as not to lose social values and humanitarian sensitivities that the human species has managed to develop with so much effort during its long-suffering history (Karasoumanaki, 2022). The fact is that mobbing is a form of group bullying, an alliance of

many against one (Leymann, 1996). This form of violence is covert and more difficult to detect than the more widespread bullying. In the USA, mobbing is called workplace bullying. Occupations related to the health, social services and education sectors are three times more likely to experience the phenomenon than other professions (Sloan *et al.*, 2011). It is speculated that this is because women mostly choose to work in these areas (Shallcross *et al.*, 2008). Research is still lagging behind in recognizing and studying this phenomenon (Sloan *et al.*, 2011).

Sociologists study the various relationships that develop within society, relationships that concern not only people, but also social groups and their particular characteristics (Kalakou, 2022). Social identities are formed through social relationships with others, as the individually unique and the collectively common are systematically interconnected and can be understood as multiple collectivities (Siganou, 2022). Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological framework describes the process of human development that occurs progressively through complex reciprocal interactions between individuals and their environment (La Salle-Finley, 2023). This model interprets phenomena as the result of a complex process influenced by interacting systems, such as the microsystem of the family and school, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem of cultural values (Ntolkera, 2017). Schools are political spaces involved in the construction and control of discourse, meaning and subjectivities, being inextricably linked to issues of power and control in the dominant society and must be seen as contradictory social spaces, characterized by struggle and accommodation, which contain ideological and material spaces for the development of radical pedagogies (Nikolidakis *et al.*, 2026). Culture becomes the mediating link between the system of power relations and the processes that characterize the education system (Giroux, 2025). At the same time, human communication is not only realized through language, but in various semiotic modes that perform different roles (Kyzaki, 2023). Multimodality offers a theoretical perspective that brings together socially organized resources for the production of meaning, such as image, writing, gesture, gaze, speech and posture, and according to visual grammar, all semiotic systems fulfill metafunctions and images, beyond language, can present social reality (Archer & Breuer, 2016).

2. Theoretical Foundations: From Bullying to School Mobbing

Much of the published research is still dominated by the model of school bullying as developed by the Norwegian researcher Olweus, which explains the phenomenon in terms that are individual-based, such as personality traits (Rousi-Vergou, 2017). According to the widely cited view of Olweus (1993), school violence is characterized as the systematic and intentional infliction of physical or psychological harm by one or more individuals to another, who lacks adequate defense capabilities. Based on this view, the phenomenon includes key characteristics, such as an imbalance of power, deliberate intent, and the repeatability of the acts. Olweus (1993) argues that violence does not represent a single episode of aggression, but a long-term and structured pattern of behavior. The relevant research highlights limitations in the discourse on bullying, which focuses on interpreting the phenomenon exclusively based on intra-individual or family factors and does not examine

cultural norms, discourses and everyday social interactions (Nikolidakis, & Kota, 2026).

Several researchers and professionals related to education and human rights see bullying as a socially and culturally complex phenomenon, warning that an individualized approach can contribute to the further exclusion of individual cases of children within the school context where they belong (Karagianni, 2018). In such research, this relationship between the individual and social view of bullying is called first-order and second-order (Slee & Mohyla, 2007), where the second-order view recognizes that bullying includes a variety of participants and can no longer be understood with exclusive reference to the terms of the bully-victim dyad or the bully-victim-bystander triad (Rousi-Vergou, 2017). The school itself, as a formative and socializing institutional field, is also responsible for the manifestation of the phenomenon, as shown by the school experience of the students. A large part of this experience is determined by the approaches and practices, both didactic and psychopedagogical, of the teachers themselves, which are linked to mechanisms of inclusion or marginalization of a portion of high-risk students, to the climate and interpersonal relationships, the dominant values, the models of exercise of power and school leadership that develop at the various levels of school life (Kalakou, 2022).

The conceptualization of school mobbing requires a departure from approaches that interpret peer aggression primarily as the outcome of individual characteristics. A relational sociological perspective suggests that social phenomena emerge through patterns of interaction, interdependence, and meaning-making among individuals and groups (Emirbayer, 1997). From this perspective, mobbing is not located within a particular individual but within the relational networks that connect students, teachers, institutional structures, and cultural expectations. Relational sociology has proceeded to redefine individuals not as independent actors, but rather as interdependent interactants, as human action is both directed and constrained by the social environment (Abbott, 2020). Social identities are many and are shaped through social relations with others, with identity emerging from a continuous action and interaction between similarity and difference within the framework of a dialectical process (Siganou, 2022). In the school context, a child's dominant position in the peer group is directly linked to the social recognition he or she receives, forming part of a broader process of negotiating the social status of children in the educational community (Sapouna, 2006). Bullying is defined as a social process in which the identities of members are defined, stigmatized, and/or put under negotiation, which contributes to the exclusion of individuals who do not fit into the group (Karagianni, 2018). Elias and Scotson (1994) analysis of established-outsider relations provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding this process. Their work demonstrates that groups often maintain cohesion by creating symbolic boundaries between "insiders" and "outsiders." The outsider is not necessarily excluded because of objective differences but because the dominant group constructs and maintains a social narrative of difference. Within school environments, similar mechanisms may occur when peer groups establish informal hierarchies of belonging. Students who differ in appearance, language, academic performance, social behavior, cultural background, or personal characteristics

may become positioned as legitimate targets of exclusion (Nikolidakis, & Kota, 2026). The important point is that difference itself does not produce marginalization; rather, marginalization emerges through collective interpretations of difference. This distinction is crucial for educational research because it prevents the reproduction of deficit perspectives that attribute exclusion to the characteristics of the excluded student. Instead, it directs attention toward the social processes through which certain differences become stigmatized (Potamias, & Kanari, 2026).

Social Identity Theory provides another important perspective for understanding collective exclusion. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), individuals construct part of their identity through membership in social groups. Group belonging provides individuals with a sense of security, recognition, and collective identity. However, the creation of an "ingroup" often involves the construction of an "outgroup." In school settings, peer groups frequently function as important sources of identity formation. Friendship networks, classroom groups, and informal student communities establish norms regarding acceptable behavior, appearance, interests, and communication styles. Students who conform to these norms are often rewarded with social recognition, while those perceived as different may experience marginalization. School mobbing emerges when processes of group identification become linked with exclusionary practices. The targeted student becomes symbolically positioned as a threat to group cohesion or as someone who violates implicit expectations. Through repeated interactions, this representation becomes stabilized and reproduced. Importantly, group participation in mobbing does not always involve direct aggression. Research on bystander behavior demonstrates that passive observers may contribute to the continuation of bullying dynamics through silence, avoidance, or failure to intervene (Salmivalli, 2010). Thus, mobbing involves a broader social ecology including perpetrators, supporters, passive observers, defenders, and institutional actors. This broader perspective demonstrates that preventing mobbing requires transforming the social environment rather than merely disciplining individual aggressors (Potamias, & Kanari, 2026).

Critical pedagogy provides an essential framework for examining how educational institutions reproduce or challenge social inequalities. Freire (2005) argued that education is never neutral; it either contributes to the maintenance of existing power relations or supports processes of emancipation and transformation. Within this perspective, schools are understood as cultural and political spaces where meanings, identities, and social hierarchies are continuously produced. Philip Jackson introduced the term "hidden curriculum" in 1968 in his work "Life in Classrooms" to describe the informal lessons that students learn in the classroom ("Hidden curriculum", 2010). The concept of the hidden curriculum highlights the implicit messages transmitted through everyday school practices, organizational structures, and interpersonal relationships (Apple, 2004b; Giroux, 1983). The term "informal" refers to what they learn not based on the classic curriculum, but on the basis of a "latent" curriculum. In the context of the school community, lessons are often taught without the students realizing it, as they do not concern a learning object but the adoption of a behavior or the formation of an opinion. Students come in contact with rules of behavior

and order on a social level (Potamias, 2024). They also acquire a perception of hierarchy and authority and realize their individual responsibility in situations. Thus, we could say that the hidden curriculum adds a sociological dimension to the field of education, as it affects the personality of students and the way they behave towards their fellow humans both inside and outside the school context.

Alongside the formal curriculum, various informal forms of teaching take place, which are due to various factors such as, a) the methods followed during teaching, b) the role and position of the student and the teacher in the school, c) the way in which the various individuals move in the classroom and in the school, d) the way in which knowledge is dealt with, e) the play of the students that takes place in the school and f) the rules that are applied in a school unit (Apple, 2004a). In many cases, the learning, perceptions and attitudes that students adopt do not come from the formal curriculum but from various factors within the school such as its internal regulations, the pace it follows, its way of organization, the attitudes and opinions of the teachers, etc. The informal aspects of learning, which are often unconscious, constitute the "hidden curriculum" or the "latent curriculum". Usually, the carrier of this program is the attitude of teachers, the attitude of students, parents, and even the attitude of the majority of members of the local community (Chatzigeorgiou, 2004). According to Lynch (1989), schools have hidden aspects that create an unequal environment for students. Although some of these aspects are visible, such as official curricula, school hours and examination procedures, some of them are hidden, such as social activities and reward systems. In addition, Giroux and Penna (1979) indicate that schools do not only provide instruction but also rules and principles that students experience during their school life Margolis (2001) further argues that the hidden curriculum is the reproduction of school education that allows for the understanding of the hegemonic function of the school and that also maintains the power of the state. In this context, students must learn to demonstrate correct emotions, attitudes, values, habits and social skills. In short, the hidden curriculum includes knowledge, ideas, practices and expectations, which are required for success in school and in society in general but are not mentioned in the official curriculum (Potamias, 2026a).

Schools are complex organizations characterized by formal structures and informal cultures. Organizational research demonstrates that institutional environments influence individual behavior by establishing expectations, norms, and patterns of interaction (Schein & Schein, 2016). School climate research has shown that positive relationships, trust, safety, and democratic participation are strongly associated with reduced levels of aggression and increased student well-being (Cohen *et al.*, 2017). Conversely, schools characterized by weak relational structures, inconsistent disciplinary practices, or limited adult intervention may create conditions where exclusionary practices persist. Although the phenomenon of school bullying is real and quite widespread, it has not yet received the necessary attention, and policies for its prevention and management have not been developed to a satisfactory degree. More generally, efforts are being made to inform and raise awareness in society, primarily through the media; however, in practice, it is the school that coordinates the

collaborations necessary for the proper and effective management of bullying, since it is the natural setting where the phenomenon occurs (Potamias, 2026b; Politi & Skordialos, 2020). The quality of teachers' supervision of students is of the utmost importance, as most incidents occur in areas where there is insufficient supervision, such as the schoolyard or hallways (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Teachers often lack the appropriate training and struggle to manage issues that arise, as the majority of them have not received specialized training in psychological and educational issues, while it is emphasized internationally that teachers need training and support to prevent and address school bullying (Potamias, 2026b; UNESCO, 2023).

3. Multimodality and the Architecture of Exclusion: A Sociosemiotic Approach

Understanding school mobbing as a complex social phenomenon requires moving beyond a purely language-centered conceptualization of communication. For much of the twentieth century, educational and social research predominantly approached language as the primary medium through which meaning was produced and negotiated. However, contemporary theories of social semiotics and multimodality argue that human communication is constituted through multiple semiotic resources, including image, spatial organization, gesture, gaze, posture, movement, voice, material objects, digital interactions, and embodied practices (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2010). Multimodality does not simply refer to the simultaneous presence of different communicative channels. Rather, it concerns the processes through which individuals and communities select, combine, and organize different semiotic modes in order to construct social meanings. According to Kress (2010), every mode possesses particular affordances, namely socially and culturally shaped possibilities for meaning-making. These affordances determine how individuals represent identities, negotiate relationships, and establish social positions within specific contexts.

In school environments, relationships among students are not constructed exclusively through verbal interaction. Inclusion, recognition, rejection, and exclusion are continuously communicated through a wide range of multimodal practices. A student may experience exclusion not only through explicit verbal aggression but also through systematic non-invitation to group activities, avoidance of eye contact, spatial marginalization within the classroom, restricted participation in peer networks, digital invisibility, or exclusion from online communities. Therefore, school mobbing can be conceptualized as a multimodal process of social meaning-making, through which peer groups construct, communicate, and maintain boundaries between those who belong and those who are positioned outside the dominant social order of the classroom. This perspective challenges traditional understandings of bullying and mobbing that primarily focus on observable aggressive acts. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of analyzing everyday communicative practices through which exclusion becomes normalized and reproduced.

Social semiotics is based on the assumption that meanings are not fixed or naturally occurring entities but are produced through social practices, cultural conventions, and relations of power (Halliday, 1978; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). This theoretical orientation provides a valuable framework

for understanding school mobbing because exclusion is not merely an outcome of aggressive behavior; it is a process through which particular identities are socially constructed. Victimization in the school environment is a process that begins with the labeling of certain students who differ from some commonly accepted, among peers, standards of appearance and behavior (Sweeting & West, 2001). In cases of social exclusion anxiety, points of differentiation "may be used to symbolically define some individual(s) as 'the other'", a process that can lead to contempt or bullying (Shute & Slee, 2021). Bullying can be interpreted as a collective process, in which the victim can be stigmatized and considered strange (Bibou-Nakou *et al.*, 2012), while it is often described with "language of othering and abjection such as 'disgusting', 'fat', 'ugly' and 'stinking'" (Shute & Slee, 2021). Students co-construct the identity of the children who are targeted as "quirky and strange", or as individuals "weak, sensitive, special and/or different" (Karagianni, 2018). Victimization is closely linked to the low physical, social and psychological status of an individual (Slee, 1994). That is, some special characteristic, which deviates from peers, in these areas is a pole of attraction for undesirable behaviors. In contrast, Olweus (1993) argues that the particular physical characteristics of an individual have little influence on their victimization. Students who deviate visibly from the "typical" class pattern, either due to academic performance or physical characteristics, become vulnerable to targeting, are placed in the position of pariahs, as in the discourse of the school community, diversity is implicitly indicated as a problem (Bourou, 2025).

It is known that human communication is not only realized through language, but also through various semiotic modes that perform different roles (Kyzaki, 2023). These representations are communicated through multiple semiotic resources, as it is internationally emphasized that a linguistic account of this interaction cannot give attention to other modes which are in play: gaze, facial expression, gesture, spatial positioning (Kress, 2010). Non-verbal bullying is practiced through body language and is manifested by gestures, an intense and persistent gaze or even by meanings and movements that can be perceived as a threat (Rigby, 2002). Children often observe the perpetrators whispering in each other's ears and giggling, while at the same time the bullies appear smiling (Kyzaki, 2023). In the digital environment, the emoji code has resurrected visibility and exclusion is achieved through group conversations of exclusion and humiliating messages, photos or comments (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Silence functions as an essential communicative practice, as bullying is often based on the law of silence and silent situations such as staring (Coloroso, 2005). Systematic ignoring of a student is a methodical, intentional and demeaning behavior, which may include exclusion from group activities, collaborations or social interactions. When a child is completely ignored or excluded from a group of friends or is deliberately excluded from events, a powerful message is transmitted that affects their social status and acceptance (Rousi-Vergou, 2017).

Through the internet, adolescents are given the opportunity to gain access to cyberspace, where they have the opportunity to satisfy their need for expression, entertainment, exploration and experimentation with their identity (Psalti *et al.*, 2012). However, the increasingly widespread use of the internet has led to an increase in risks related to the safety and well-being of adolescents, leading

to the transfer of bullying and victimization behaviors to digital environments (Pichel *et al.*, 2021). Cyberbullying is the general term that describes any communication activity that uses digital technology (computers, mobile phones, etc.) and is harmful to one or more individuals. This behavior is characterized by the concept of exploitation and is expressed by the creation of online hate groups, the violation of electronic privacy, electronic harassment, disrespectful speech, the dissemination of violent and provocative material without the consent of the other (Smith *et al.*, 2008). Belsey (2004) concluded that cyberbullying is the use of communication and information technology to support intentional, repetitive and hostile behavior by an individual or group of individuals that is intended to harm others, while Willard (2007) differentiates its definition by introducing the concept of social violence/cruelty in the online space that is imposed on victims who cannot defend themselves.

The phenomenon of cyberbullying can take place through any different means of communication that exists on the Internet. In other words, in written texts (SMS), through e-mail messages, through personal blogs, within the multitude of social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other applications that are particularly widespread among young people (Belsey, 2019). Smith *et al.* (2008) mention seven different means of communication through which cyberbullying can be caused: mobile phone calls, text messages, e-mail, images/videos with bullying content, websites, virtual chat rooms and instant messaging. It is an indisputable fact that cyberbullying originates from the school environment, as in reality the online is an extension of the offline and vice versa. From a multimodal semiotic perspective, design is crucial for the shaping of all communication environments and through them for the shaping of social relations everywhere lives (Kress, 2010). Thus, the hierarchies and mechanisms that are structured in the physical classroom are reproduced, as what happens in the school environment is likely to be transmitted online, with children using digital resources based on the experiences and relational practices by which they live in other contexts, including school (Schott, 2014).

According to the new scientific trends, the phenomenon of school bullying needs a holistic treatment, which treats the school as a formative and socializing institutional field where human action is directed but also limited by the social environment (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991; Giroux, 2025). Based on the theoretical synthesis developed above, this article proposes the Multimodal Architecture of Exclusion Framework (MAEF) as a comprehensive model for analyzing school bullying. The framework conceives of exclusion as a dynamic process resulting from interactions among five interconnected dimensions. The first dimension concerns Institutional Structures, as the success of educational organizations in dealing with bullying is highly dependent on the environment in which they operate, determining whether exclusionary practices will be dismissed as trivial and their seriousness underestimated (Cemaloğlu, 2011). It is necessary to have a clear educational policy that will promote a critical culture for victimization phenomena (Smith, 1997), given that the principal has a dominant role in the effective management and functionality of the school unit but also in the prevention, management and treatment of phenomena of school and workplace bullying (Basina, 2022).

The second dimension is the Ecology of the Classroom, which is a framework of interactions and a microcosm of society consisting of teachers and students with different goals for the educational process, values and cultural background. The formation of the pedagogical climate of the school classroom is influenced by several factors, the main of which are the following:

- a) The classroom teacher, who is the main factor in shaping the pedagogical process within the classroom, since based on his own positions, intentions, actions, the educational act is planned and implemented with the more active or passive participation of the students. The formation of relationships between students and with the teacher also depends to a large extent on the pedagogical and methodological choices of the teacher himself.
- b) The students in the classroom and the way they treat each other, all together and each individually, the teacher, the educational process, learning, the role and operation of the school as an institution.
- c) The subjects (syllabus, goals, objectives, exams) that may be considered by the students (each one individually depending on their inclinations, interests and abilities) as difficult or easy, interesting or boring and accordingly the emotional and learning attitude of the students towards them is shaped.
- d) The school space, which depending on its location, size, comfort, design, arrangement, brightness, equipment with pedagogical materials and means (library, scientific instruments, supervisory material, etc.) can create in the students a mood to stay and be active in it, opportunities for cooperation or for confrontation between them and so on.
- e) The style of teaching and management of the school class that is chosen by the teacher but has a strong impact on the students, since it places them in contexts of participation, abstention or indifference. Essentially, it is the style of the teacher's broader behavior in the classroom, since this refers to the way in which he or she shapes his or her relationship with students, both in the broader context of classroom management and in the more specific context of the process and learning (Oikonomidis, 2017).

The third dimension refers to social interaction with peers, which is of great importance for children as it forms the basis for the development of relationships with other children (Schaffer, 1996). Research on this topic has shown again that the vast majority of these interactions occur in groups of children of the same sex: boys are members of boys' groups and girls are members of girls' groups (Underwood, 2004). These segregated gender groups exist from early childhood to early adolescence. Studies on peer groups show that children are attracted to others with whom they share similar characteristics. Similarity between individuals creates relationships that are synchronous (Campbell *et al.*, 2015). At least two criteria underlie the similarity of peers in same-sex groups: influence and selection (Ennett & Bauman, 1994). Considering the emotional social relationships that adolescents have by creating a special space with their peers, the emotional benefits of these relationships, such as appreciation, acceptance, and care, play a supportive role in their healthy development. Therefore, while adolescents' ability to control their emotions can positively affect the quality of friendships they form and their social competence, it can also cause them to be excluded from peer groups, left alone

and ignored in the exact opposite situation and affect their emotional and social development. When we discuss the issue through the influence of peers on adolescents, we are concerned with whether peers show healthy emotional social development or the dynamics that can be produced by the way they maintain friendship relationships. In other words, peers, as leading roles in adolescent life, teach each other which behavior is key to being accepted (Putallaz, 1983). Mobbing emerges when peer networks use flexible ways of inclusion and exclusion from the group, proceeding to selective use of norms based on gender, appearance, ethnicity, abilities, athletic skills, social class, other norms established by the peer group, as well as a combination of these (Thornberg, 2018).

The fourth dimension is based on the concept of multimodality, i.e. the way in which people create and understand meaning using more than one mode of communication. According to the social semiotic approach, communication is not limited to spoken or written language, but results from the combination of different semiotic resources, such as language, images, gestures, facial expressions, posture, movement, space, sound and digital media (Kress, 2010). Exclusion is manifested through language by insulting the personality and dignity of the individual mainly through irony and mockery, while it often includes insulting the genital characteristics of the gender or other characteristics (Kalliataki & Geraki, 2022). In visual representation, it is considered that images, beyond language, can present social reality, highlighting the power relationship between the depicted persons and the viewer. Body language is decisive, as non-verbal bullying is manifested by threatening gestures and movements, as well as intense, hostile looks. This harassment is practiced with body language through movements that can be perceived as threatening or intimidating, including facial expression and eye contact (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Spatial arrangements reflect social hierarchies, as elements such as the professor's chair structure the interaction through the spatial structure which they impose on it (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991) and according to international literature, social relations determine the distance (literally and figuratively) we keep from each other (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). In digital communication, exclusion manifests itself through the sending of messages and photos with vulgar or threatening content (Politi & Skordialos, 2020) and in forms such as punking, which refers to verbal violence and humiliation that occurs publicly from one man to another (Phillips, 2007), fraping, which refers to the modification of someone's online profile without their permission (Collins Dictionary, n.d.), trolling, the bombardment with insults and threats due to disagreement, flaming, the posting of insults, often including profanity or other offensive language, on the Internet, and slamming, groups that engage in online harsh criticism or harassment (Chisholm & Day, 2013). Material environments are composed of stratified and tangled networks which, though always material in form, nevertheless have an existence beyond their materiality (Lefebvre, 1974/1991). Elements such as clothing or appearance are a reason for ridicule, while social attributes such as clothing, especially uniforms and formal dress reinforce the speaker's position of power (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991).

The fifth dimension concerns individual experience and identity, recognizing that the feeling of worthiness is closely

linked to feeling accepted as part of something, to being included in a community, and is inextricably linked to the existential need for social embeddedness, the necessity of belonging (Søndergaard, 2014). Individual experience is not interpreted as the cause of mobbing, as individual characteristics are not considered to be the primary causes of bullying, but may be another symptom that appears in educational environments that have not yet sufficiently developed all those interventions and pedagogical care from which all students could benefit (Rousi-Vergou, 2017). Concerns about safety and depression negatively affect students' academic performance as, when students are preoccupied with safety issues or experience depressive symptoms, they are less able to focus on their studies and achieve high performance (Kim *et al.*, 2020). The Multimodal Architecture of Exclusion Framework (MAEF) proposes that school mobbing should be understood as a social process (Salmivalli, 2010), where the subject is an inherently socially orientated system that is necessarily engaged in making meaning of its interactions with others. Exclusion is both socially organized and institutionally mediated, as decisions made by school administrators also transmit signals regarding norms, leadership practices, and supports (Søndergaard, 2014), while pedagogically it is reproduced when in the school context it is likely to observe and legitimize the unequal power relationship between students (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012).

4. The Sociopedagogical Ecology of School Bullying: Relational Sociology, Critical Pedagogy, and Institutional Transformation

The analysis of school mobbing requires a conceptual shift towards a broader ecological understanding, as the concept of bullying can not be understood without taking into account the broader context of the situation in which these phenomena occur (Beran, 2006). Although individual acts of aggression are visible manifestations, a behavioral problem is never remote from the system in which it manifests itself (Sroufe *et al.*, 2005), since behind the aggressive acts there is something more than the simplistic explanation that someone did something bad and therefore this must be addressed (Malama, 2015). Students, teachers who co-shape the socio-ecological context, institutional structures and cultural meanings constantly interact, since the model emphasises the bi-directional connections between individuals and their environment, meaning that the child both affects and is affected by the settings in which they are situated (Mauder & Crafter, 2018).

Ecological approaches to educational research emphasize that students' experiences cannot be separated from their environment (Mauder & Crafter, 2018), as juvenile aggression is the result of various factors that influence the juvenile individual, such as culture, community, school, family, and personal issues (Politi & Skordialos, 2020). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) accounts for the multiple social and cultural systems in which an individual is situated, and which mutually influence their development (Mauder & Crafter, 2018), defining that human development takes place within a complex of interrelations with in the immediate setting referred to as the microsystem, which extends to a mesosystem that comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer

group (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

According to the ecosystem theory, bullies and victims of bullying are part of a complex, multi-level system that places the individuals themselves at the center, while around this, a series of contexts that influence them are placed: the micro- (family, school environment, peers), meso- (teacher involvement), exo- (Mass Media, neighborhood), macro- (cultural norms), chrono-systemic level (changes in family structure) (Karagianni, 2018). Within peer groups, bullying often manifests itself where there are social groups with clear hierarchical and power relations, as popularity is based on hierarchy, prestige and privileges (Adams *et al.*, 2005). Classroom interaction patterns reflect how power relations are shaped and negotiated in children's social interactions (Schott, 2014), while teachers co-shape the socio-ecological context in which children are embedded and must reflect on their teaching and pedagogical approaches (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The organizational culture of the school gives the organization a sense of identity and the principal plays a catalytic role in shaping organizational order and ethical behavior (Leymann, 1996). At a broader social level, diversity is implicitly indicated as a problem, which seems to stem from the position that the "other" threatens the status quo (Karagianni, 2018). The importance of this perspective lies in the assumption that the phenomenon of bullying in the school environment is not a superficial or inter-personal problem, but reflects a problem directly linked to the organizational and administrative parameters of the school, and mainly to its characteristics as a social environment (Karanikola *et al.*, 2018).

Relational sociology provides one of the most powerful theoretical approaches for understanding school mobbing because it focuses on relationships, networks, and processes rather than isolated actors. Emirbayer (1997) argues that social life should not be understood through static categories but through dynamic relations among individuals and groups. From this perspective, a student does not become excluded because of inherent characteristics. Instead, exclusion emerges through relational processes that define certain identities as legitimate and others as problematic (Potamias, & Kanari, 2026). The classroom constitutes a social space where the excluded student is not absolutely outside, but remains part of the group, as marginalization and bullying are part of intricate social patterns; they are practices of open-ended enactments (Schott, 2014). Within this relational field, students negotiate their social status, given that most bullies wish to feel powerful among their peers and are often the leaders of the group, while at the same time realizing that popularity is a rare and desirable social resource, when one student rises in popularity, another often loses status (Karagianni, 2018). The pursuit of recognition is central, as the process of adulthood is emotionally linked to the expectation of and hope for recognition and community. The sense of belonging is an existential need, since friendships are based on choice and a sense of belonging and are inextricably linked to the existential need for social embeddedness, the necessity of belonging (Nikolidakis, & Kosmas, 2025; Schott, 2014).

Peer culture represents a central dimension of school mobbing because students construct informal systems of meaning that influence acceptance and exclusion. Schools are not only places of academic learning; they are also environments where young people develop social identities

and negotiate group membership. The theory of social identity asserts that the individual can define his being, himself, according to the social group to which he belongs (Papadopoulou, 2020), as social identification refers to the fact that we perceive and behave in social situations on the basis of groups to which we and others belong. The act of bullying can lead to social acceptance due to the acquisition of a high status among classmates, while the identity signals we emit may be overt or covert and include clothing, language (spoken and nonverbal), humor and even food choice. Students who adopt these standards gain recognition, while adolescents may wear clothing that marks them out; these signals are markers of group inclusion and exclusion, and those who are perceived to violate them may be marginalized (Shute & Slee, 2021). Bullying refers more to the quality of interactions taking into account the whole group of people involved, i.e. the aggressor, the victim, but also the bystanders (Kress, 2010). The peer group can cause victimization in cases where there is the bully's ability to turn his peers against the child or target group, including roles such as leader, follower, reinforcer and defender (Schott, 2014).

Critical pedagogy offers an important framework for understanding the school environment, as every educational process, considering education as a purely political act, has an ethical, an analytical and a programmatic dimension (Vasileiadis, 2016). According to Freire (2005), the teacher's role is to approach codified problems about existential situations to support students to achieve a critical perception of their reality. A school that focuses exclusively on behavior control of ten adopts individual-centered approaches both in analysis and in trying to find a solution, while ignoring that the school as an educational organization is not socially neutral (Karolidou, 2016). On the contrary, a critical pedagogical approach seeks the transformation of relationships, as the critical awareness of the conditions of existence connects the goals of the analytic program with social issues that concern the students so that they are not fragmented and cut off from the real issues that concern them (Vasileiadis, 2016). A shift from a disciplinary model to a communicative and therapeutic one is necessary, going beyond the traditional disciplinary approach which focuses solely on the application of rules and consequences often through punishment (Bourou, 2025).

School leadership is a determining factor for school success, the implementation of innovations, school effectiveness and the development of an inclusive school culture against intra-school violence and bullying (Giampanidou, 2026). The principal must make decisions by taking into account the opinion and experience of his colleagues, creating a supportive environment where teachers enhance their participation in the decision-making process and school governance. Part of the violence that occurs in the school environment is directly related to the violence of the institution, to the climate and the structural organization of the schools, as leadership is an important factor because it is directly linked to the formation of the organizational culture (Sapouna, 2006). An introspective approach to addressing school bullying, which starts from the perception that it is an issue of individuals or groups rather than a general policy, often fails to recognize incidents that are considered part of the culture and general policy developed by the organization (Kalliataki & Geraki, 2022).

5. Conclusions

The socio-pedagogical analysis developed in this paper suggests that school mobbing emerges through the interaction of three interconnected systems: the relational system, the pedagogical system, and the institutional system. School bullying is a phenomenon that is based on social relations between members of a group, constituting a dynamic network of relations inside and outside of school (Sapouna, 2006). Within these networks, power relations determine the dynamics of the system, since school bullying is a systematic, repeated abuse of power and authority, which manifests itself intentionally within a specific social and cultural context (Kalakou, 2022). Pedagogically, good teaching is the most important measure for preventing behavioral problems, while the implementation of collaborative learning models and experiential activities enhances collaboration (Papadopoulou, 2020). Classroom management is achieved through the establishment of rules that are clear, accepted by all, fair and realistic, creating a strict but fair framework for an aging school life (Bourou, 2025). At the institutional level, leadership is crucial, as the manager-leader must create the appropriate organizational climate to avoid harassment phenomena (Kalliataki & Geraki, 2022), taking responsibility in the prevention and confrontation of bullying behaviors (Bradshaw & Figiel, 2012). Organizational culture is critical, since mobbing is not only caused by peer pressure or interpersonal relationships, but also by the structure of the educational organization (Salin, 2008). Institutional policies require the existence of a clear educational policy that will promote a critical culture of victimization phenomena (Smith, 1997), as well as changes in the internal regulations of the school in order to prevent the consolidation of the phenomenon (Nikolidakis, & Kota, 2026; Kalliataki & Geraki, 2022). In conclusion, the integration of multimodality in education highlights that the aim is to highlight students' representations and the way they process the concept of school bullying through multimodal texts, so that they can express themselves and, above all, learn to be critical thinkers towards what they read (Kyzaki, 2023). This multidimensional approach achieves the transformation of attitudes, as the mental, emotional, physical, linguistic and social engagement of students through music, painting, musical movement, theatre, photography, cinema and literature develops social communication skills and forms stronger interpersonal relationships, which act as a protective barrier against school bullying (Terzitanou, 2016). Therefore, a systemic transformation is required that goes beyond the logic of punishment and is oriented towards practices such as peer counseling and mediation (Giampanidou, 2026), in order to cultivate discussions, dialogues, and a climate of mutual trust and acceptance, where mutual respect, solidarity, understanding and acceptance of the different Other are the fundamental principles (Kyzaki, 2023).

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