
THE REPRESENTATION OF BULLYING IN AMERICAN FILMS

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ABSTRACT

The issue of bullying continues to be reported by the media because it still happens everywhere, especially in schools, and needs to be discussed in research. This qualitative research focuses on studying American films with the theme of bullying, namely *Bully* (2011), *A Girl Like Her* (2015), and *Wonder* (2017) as the main source of data. This study aims to identify how American movies portray bullying and to find out what bullying represents by applying Hall's representation theory. Dialogs collected and sorted from the films were treated as signs that would convey more meanings. The results of data analysis suggest that American films with the themes of bullying frequently show bullying through portraits of physical violence, verbal violence, and trauma. Besides, bullying can also indicate a lack of attention from the family, the condition of the social environment, and the powerlessness of humans.

Keywords: *American films; bullying; schools; trauma; violence*

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INTRODUCTION

Living in society certainly cannot be separated from various problems. Every individual must have good or bad experiences when interacting with other individuals. One of the many problems that often occurs is bullying. Cases of bullying are often reported in various countries. It has long been a problem that seems to have never gone

away. It happens anywhere, such as in schools, campuses, workplaces, and other public places. However, most studies reveal that many people have been bullied in their teens (Aalsma & Brown, 2008, p. 101). This explanation seems to be in line with the information or news on bullying in the present time. In 2020, for instance, according to the data reported by UNICEF Indonesia through their website www.unicef.org with the theme

“Bullying in Indonesia”, showed that at least 2 out of girls or boys aged 15 -17 years have been bullied.

The experience of being bullied by other people can impact the victims differently. Therefore, finding a way to end bullying is essential, even if it is not easy (Kustanti et al., 2020, p. 1507). This shows that the issue of bullying is still a concern for many people and needs to be discussed in forums or research.

Bullying is something complicated, and it may happen for many reasons (Swearer & Hymel, 2015, p. 344). However, it is commonly considered a nan adversetion that, iny people experience. One is said to be experiencing bullying when he feels helpless in a state of pressure over the actions done by other people, and he then worries and is scared that the incident will occur again (Akasyah et al., 2018, p. 538). Bullying can be categorized into physical, verbal, and cyberbullying (Nurmalia et al., 2021, p. 247). Even though many people think that bullying in this era is rare, the phenomenon still often happens anytime and anywhere in this era. In Indonesia, for instance, bullying by a group of students is still frequently reported in the media. This is an unfortunate condition because schools should be able to provide education and guidance to students to stop bullying.

Due to the large number of bullying cases that have occurred in American society, which may cause physical and mental injury or even death (Benedict et al., 2014, p. 2), the issue of bullying has been widely discussed in media. It is also often used as a theme in films. American films, for instance, frequently depict the phenomenon of bullying. This issue would be a path for people to see the problems. Many

phenomena or knowledge can be learned by every individual when watching films (Adi, 2011, p. 71; Rudy et al., 2021, p. 43). This shows that the issue of bullying reflected in movies can be something that people need to study. Therefore, a study about bullying reflected in films must be read by people. It is also important because bullying, especially in the school environment, would become a serious concern for everyone. Therefore, the study aims to reveal what portraits are often found in American films about bullying and identify what bullying can represent.

This research theoretically contributes to theory development in relevant fields such as literary and cultural studies, film studies, and other humanities. It can be a reference for other researchers studying a similar issue. Besides, this study can also provide a better understanding and more information about the issue of bullying for everyone so that people can help prevent bullying from occurring in society. This study focuses on the analysis of three American movies with the theme of bullying, namely *Bully* (2011), *A Girl Like Her* (2015), and *Wonder* (2017). These films are also often mentioned in lists of films about bullying from the internet, such as the IMBd website. The phenomenon of bullying depicted in the three films becomes the object of discussion in this study by concentrating on dialogs related to bullying between characters and scenes portraying bullying in the films.

Literature review was carried out by reviewing several journal articles. Most of them were studies on the issue of bullying that previous researchers had conducted. A review of several scientific articles provides information on the issue of bullying associated with the mental health of the victims. For instance, a study by Swearer and Hymel

(2015) argued that bullying, a complex phenomenon, must be overcome with efforts related to individual experience, characteristics, causes, consequences, and others. Other findings on bullying from a mental perspective, such as studies by Fullchange and Furlong (2016), Akasyah et al. (2018), Huang et al. (2018), Kustanti et al. (2020), Lucas-Molina et al. (2022) emphasized the psychological effects experienced by victims of bullying such as fear, sadness, and trauma.

However, a study by Bokhari et al. (2020) talked about the various effects of bullying depending on the condition of victim's condition contribute to the strength of the victims. Apart from that, there are also two journal articles which talked about bullying in films such as the studies conducted by Ningrum and Bahri (2020) as well as Nurmalia et al. (2021) which pointed out the some types of bullying in films entitled *A Girl Like Her* and *Carrie*. Even though this study discusses about the issue of bullying in American films, it is still different from the previous studies described above in terms of approach to data analysis, types of films used as data as well as research questions. Those are the points that can be research gaps filled by this study to become a study with an element of novelty.

Before moving to the results, it is essential to define several important terms used in this study in order to avoid misunderstanding. The first term that needs to be defined properly is bullying. It is perhaps no longer a new term. Many people must have heard of it. However, not everyone can actually understand what bullying is. An individual is said to be bullied when he experiences repeated negative treatment and usually he is unable to defend himself from the bully (Olweus, 1994, p. 98).

According to Jan and Husain (2015, p. 43), bullying is student's behavior that relies on strength that tends to be continuous and damaging such as to hit, to threaten, to insult someone, etc. In addition, Ningrum and Bahri (2020, p. 3) explained that it is an act of using violence or threats to intimidate others.

Bullying is also defined as forms of violent behaviors that contain elements of physical and psychological coercion against individuals who are weak and unable to fight back (Zakiyah et al., 2017, p. 326) and the bullying behavior can result in injury to the victim (Hartati et al., 2020, p. 55). People often equate bullying with aggressive behavior. Regarding this, Aalsma and Brown (2008, p. 102) it is necessary to understand in advance that the basic aspect of distinguishing bullying and aggressive behaviors lies in imbalance of power. It means that if the victim cannot resist the strength of the bullies who are older in age or more in number of bullies, then the victim is deemed to have been bullied. It means that the victim of bullying is usually weaker than the bully, therefore, the victim is unable to defend himself and is forced to accept bullying. As explained in the previous section, in general, many studies have found that bullying can be done in the form of physical violence, verbal violence and bullying in cyberspace (Akasyah et al., 2018, p. 541; Lucas-molina et al., 2022, p. 39; Nurmalia et al., 2021, p. 247).

It is said that bullying is considered to be common in school and an unfavorable school environment will trigger bullying (Armitage, 2021, p. 2; Bokhari et al., 2020, p. 1; Gomba & Tsai, 2012, p. 162; Huang et al., 2018, p. 231; Swearer & Hymel, 2015, p. 347). Acts of bullying are more common in schools although it is also possible that bullying can occur in the

workplace, home, etc. In general, victims of bullying will have problems in adjusting and functioning their emotions (Fullchange & Furlong, 2016, p. 2). So, besides the difference in the level of strength between the bully and the victim, victims of bullying also generally experience emotional stress that will have an impact on their lives. After collecting several definitions on bullying from different sources, this study tries to interpret the term bullying as a physical or words that are oppressive and insulting carried out by a person or group of people to make a weak individual or some people afraid and comfortable in various ways.

METHODOLOGY

This library research uses films as the primary data to be analyzed to obtain the research results. This kind of research is carried out by collecting information from various materials in library such as books, articles, magazines, journals, etc. related to the research topic (Sari & Asmendri, 2020, p. 44). Thus, this study is also known as a qualitative research and in this case, qualitative research is described by Creswell (2010, p. 16) as a type of research that functions to obtain a lot of explanations from various data source regarding the phenomenon or issue being studied. So, in terms of research objectives, this study can be classified as descriptive research because it intends to explain in detail the phenomenon being studied. This research involves two types of data. The first is primary data. The main data used as the object of study are three American films with the theme of bullying are: *Bully* (2011) directed by Lee Hirsch and produced by Cinereach; *A Girl like Her* (2015) directed by Amy S. Weber and produced by Radish Creative Group; and *Wonder* (2017) directed by Stephen Chbosky.

The data from films are in the form of dialogues.

There three steps for collecting data from the films. First, the three films are watched carefully (for several times) to figure out which dialogues and scene descriptions need to be taken as well as to understand the message conveyed by the films. Second, re-watching the three films while writing out the dialogues and the descriptions of the scenes picturing the dialogues. Although note-taking is often seen by most people as an old-fashioned method, this way is actually helpful. Note-taking helps people to understand information better so that it can be reviewed and studied for the long term (Özçakmak, 2019, p. 581). So, the notetaking technique is used in the process of recording the dialogues from films because it is considered more practical. Finally, after all the dialogues and scene descriptions have been recorded in the notes the sorting process is carried out by placing the dialogues and the scene descriptions according to the keywords provided.

In terms of data analysis, this study can be classified as a content analysis study. It is usually applied to analyze, explain and interpret data in the form of text, media, etc. to obtain ideas, information, as well as definitions about the studied phenomenon (Adi, 2011, p. 144; Pal, 2017, p. 483). All the collected data is analyzed by using the theory of representation by Stuart Hall to construct meanings. This theory is suitable for this study because the dialogues and scene descriptions from the films can symbolize something. Thus, they need to be explored in order to obtain the meaning. According to Hall (1997, p. 19) all studied objects such as words, ideas, views, photos, etc. can be categorized into symbols.

Therefore, the representation theory used in this study is to interpret the dialogues as well as the scenes descriptions in order to form or construct the meanings behind them.

DISCUSSION

The Portraits of Bullying in Films

The results of the data analysis showed that American films on bullying frequently show three portraits as follows:

a. Portrait of Physical Violence

The portrait of physical violence was one of the images frequently presented in the films with the theme of bullying being discussed. The acts of bullying shown in films about bullying were often identical with physical violence. Violence experienced by students according to Ferrar et al. (2019, p. 3) can be in various forms and one of them is physical aggressive behavior aimed at punishing or bullying which can be done by adults or kids.

Regarding this, Jan and Husain (2015, p. 53) in their research explained that physical violence towards victims of bullying was part of the behavior that was often done by bullies. physical violence has a negative meaning, especially when it occurs in schools, campuses, or workplaces. This condition is indeed concerning because a school is supposed to be a safe, convenient, and quiet place to study and make friends. However, there are any cases of bullying that actually happen in schools. Acts of physical violence committed by bullies can take various forms of treatment. In general, bullies push, kick, water, throw something at the victim or damage their belongings (Nurmalia et al., 2021, p. 28; Sulisrudatin, 2014, p. 59). Similar acts of violence are also shown in films about bullying.

For instance, the depiction of physical violence was portrayed in the movie *Bully* (2011). There were scenes when a student named Alex was hit by a bully:

Philip: What happened this week on the bus? Anything?

Alex: This high schooler was strangling me, but I think he was just messing around.

Philip: That's not messing around.

(00:55:32)

Alex: What? Why are you punching me?

Bully: I'll use my cell phone, bitch. Little bitch. Come on!

Alex: No, no, no. Ow!

Bully: Bitch!

Alex: Why you stabbing me with it?

Bully: Gonna knock your fish lips off!

(01:07:55)

Alex's mother: It's absolutely not acceptable. I mean, they're stabbing him with pencils, and choking him.

(01:10:42)

The film dialog above shows that the bully knew that the victim did not dare to fight him, so he took advantage of the victim's weakness. The film character Alex is described as someone who is afraid of the bully. The fear makes it difficult for him to be honest when his father asked him. This condition is experienced by almost all victims of bullying. In fact, people who are victims of bullying do not have the ability or courage to defend themselves. So, the bullies can freely suppress and commit physical violence to them. There was also a scene of physical violence experienced by a male student named Auggie who had a facial disfigurement in the film *Wonder* (2017). He was pushed by other students who bullied him:

Boy (bully): What are you gonna do about it? Get out of my way.

Auggie: No.

Boy (bully): I said get outta my way!
Auggie: I said no!

(01:34:53)

Based on several studies bullying with physical violence is often done by boys (Hartati et al., 2020, p. 60; Sulisrudatin, 2015, p. 58). It is also possible that bullying can also occur among female students, although these cases are not as frequent as cases of bullying done by male students.

However, in the film *A Girl Like Her* (2015), there was a female bully who committed physical violence against a female victim



Figure 1. *A Girl Like Her* (2015) - Avery and her friends pushed Jessica into the toilet and flushed her (00:51:13)

The bully named Avery degraded kicked and pushed the victim into the toilet. Such a violent act is considered harmful physical violence.

Bullying with physical intimidation (violence) that happens in schools is similar to dangerous actions that shows power imbalance (Fu et al., 2015, p. 487). The victim's weakness becomes an opportunity for the bully to continue harassing and attacking the victim. Even in a study conducted by Shidiqi and Suprarti (2013, p. 94) showed that physical violence often resulted in injuries to the victims. Even in the film *Bully* (2011) there was a scene depicting a mother who was

angrily disappointed because bullying had taken the life of her child:

Tina: My baby was missing two and three days of school a week because there's a gang of five boys threatening to beat him up at school every single day. It was reported to everyone, and nobody did nothing.

(00:40:44)

There have been studies that show evidence about bullying with acts of physical violence resulting in death, such as news about bullying among crew members, in dormitories or schools as well as in the army with cases of soldiers who died due to bullying (Koo, 2007, p. 109). So, it is right to say that all kinds of physical violence are basically negative. This portrait of physical violence is a depiction that appears frequently in films on bullying because physical violence is identical with acts of bullying. Thus, the emergence of this image can actually reflect a perception that bullying can be interpreted as physical hurting or torture. This is shown in the film with the aim of exposing the impact of physical violence experienced by victims of bullying.

b. Portrait of Verbal Violence

The next portrait is verbal violence. This may also be called as verbal bullying or verbal abuse. This depiction was often present in the films discussed in this study. It is indeed true that verbal abuse can occur anywhere and anytime. In schools for example, verbal violence is often done by both male and female bullies. This action becomes the habit of bullies to make their victims feel afraid and diffident. This kind of violence is often pictured in the discussed films. Regarding this, Antiri (2016, p. 132) explained that it has a more serious impact compared to physical violence since negative words can damage a

person's mentality which can lead to psychological and emotional problems such as loss of confidence, feelings of inferiority, etc. Bullying using verbal violence is likely to happen because the bully can simply do it in an easy way for instance by whispering or shouting at the victim in a public place without anyone suspecting (Muntaha et al., 2015, p. 43).

Verbal bullying is generally done by the bullies in the form of threatening and harsh words as well as ridicule to embarrass the victims and to make them leave the schools (Jan & Husain, 2015, p. 43; Kustanti et al., 2020, p. 1512; Putri et al., 2021, p. 792). The use of harsh words in verbal bullying was also portrayed in the studied films. In *Bully* (2011) and *A Girl Like Her* (2015) for instance, the words often used to call the victims were "bitch" or little bitch". The word has an unpleasant meaning, and it degrades one's dignity. There were scenes showing the victims of bullying expressing their sadness such as in *Bully* (2011):

"He calls me b-word."
(00:55:32)

"He calls me faggot. It breaks my heart."
(00:14:43)

"He comes to me. I try to get away from him.

"He follows me. And he criticizes me, calling me pussy".
(00:30:15)

"When I opened my locker, there was a note that said 'Faggots aren't welcomed here. And another teacher told me how they burned fags, and kept talking about it with me in the classroom, and everyone was laughing. And they knew it was hurting me, and they kept going."
(00:20:10)

In the film *A Girl Like Her* (2015), for instance, there were several dialogs that can be shown as examples of verbal bullying:

Avery: Oh, wow. You have no clothes. Aww, what are you gonna do? That is so sad."
(00:51: 24)

Apart from that, the victim of bullying in the film also received messages sent by the bully that contained elements of verbal violence:

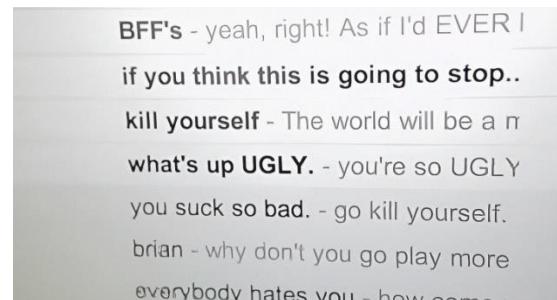


Figure 2. *A Girl Like Her* (2015) - Verbal bullying in the form of insulting words sent by the bully (00:48:13)

In the film *Wonder* (2017), a character named Auggie that had a facial disfigurement became the object of ridicule by a bully:

Julian: Hey, can I sit there?
Auggie: Sure.
Julian: You eat like the Sarlacc monster, my young Padawan.
(00:19:33)

Julian: I actually have a question for Auggie. What's the deal with the braid in the back of your hair? Is it like a Padawan thing?

Charlotte: What's a Padawan thing?
Julian: It's from Star Wars. Padawan is a Jedi apprentice.
(00:18:01)

No one likes to be made fun. Nobody will be happy when he or she is called by an impolite name or with hurtful words. In fact, it is part of the act of bullying and is also the action most often committed by a bully to his victim.

Inappropriate words used by bullies are generally adapted to local traditions and culture, such as calling victims by their parents' names in an insulting tone; uttering threatening words; or comparing the victim to something negative (Asrul et al., 2021, p. 1554).

Verbal bullying is often seen as something normal or a joke for many people do not realize how dangerous it is if it just keeps happening. Teasing someone with jokes over and over again is not funny because it can lead to the unexpected consequences. This is essential because inappropriate and negative words used for bullying can hurt and psychologically disturb the victims (Putri et al., 2021). The emergence of a group of students who like to bully by uttering harsh words or ridicule their friends can be caused by some factors. However, the most fundamental cause is connected to the role of teacher. According to Burger et al (2022, p. 2313) there are still many school teachers who do not consider bullying as a serious problem, so they tend to ignore or pay less attention to the problem.

The films discussed in this study frequently show verbal violence because the simplest way of bullying is to use negative words to insult the victim. This can also indicate that simple acts of bullying must be taken seriously and teachers also need to be active in educating students about the dangers of bullying and be alert when small acts that lead to bullying appear so that they can be stopped immediately.

b. Portrait of Trauma

Trauma is one of the images that often appeared in the films about bullying discussed in this study. The scenes showing traumatized

victims of bullying can capture the attention of those who watched the films. In general, the word trauma does not sound like it has a positive meaning. Trauma is usually associated with unpleasant conditions. Basically, according to Anggadewi (2020, p. 2) people who experience trauma will feel mental pressure due to something bad happened to them, deep disappointment or things that hurt them physically.

For example, in the film *Bully* (2011), there is a scene showing that the younger sister of a bullied victim feels afraid of going to school because her brother is bullied at school:

Alex's sister: You're starting to make scared to go to middle school.

Alex: Why?

Alex's sister: Cause if you get picked on, I'm gonna get picked on. I already get picked on at school 'cause you're my brother.

(00:55:32)

There is also a scene portraying a mother sadly tells that her child was trauma:

Tina: My baby was missing two and three days of school a week because there's a gang of five boys threatening to beat him up at school every single day.

(00:40:44)

In the film *A Girl like Her* (2015), a character named Jessica who is a victim of bullying at school expresses her sadness and severe trauma:

Jessica: I can't. I can't. I can't do it. I can't do it anymore; I just can't put up with it. I can't put up with it anymore; I'm done. I can't. I can't do it; I just don't know how much more of this I can take; It's not gonna get better, it's gonna get worse. It's never gonna end; I just feel like, I have no way out.

(00:52:13)

Wonder (2017) also shows a scene where a victim of bullying Auggie feels traumatized and even hates his own body because his classmate insulted him:

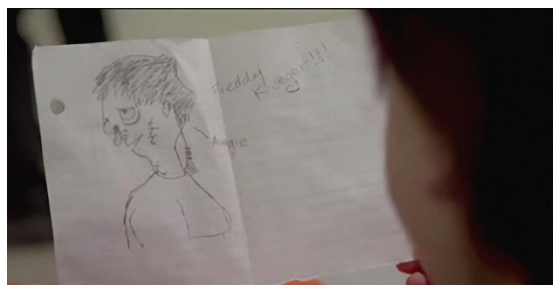


Figure 3. *Wonder* (2017) – Auggie’s face was drawn by the bully for insulting purposes (00:24:10)

Auggie was sad and asked his mother why he had an ugly face. However, his mother encouraged him by telling him that he was not ugly at all. The worries and fears experienced by victims of bullying as shown in the film dialogs above will make their condition worse. An individual who experiences trauma from a bad incident will tend to face more problems and difficulties in his life. Akasyah et al. (2018) revealed that the effects of bullying experienced by the victim can be in any forms and the psychological condition of the victim is also likely to be affected.

Prolonged trauma may cause a person to feel uncomfortable, anxious, and afraid. This is what Sulisrudatin (2015, p. 58) says that trauma can be the cause to the emergence of various psychological disorders in victims of bullying. In other words, the trauma can disrupt a person’s mental stability. The worst thing that can occur as a result of trauma is the act of ending one’s life. News that often circulated in various media shows that traumatized bullying victims who commit suicide is not a lie. This incident will happen because a person with a serious trauma may lose his or her self-control.

Thus, Bullying should not be taken lightly because those who are traumatized by the bullying that happened to them can develop intentions or thoughts to end their lives (Gomba & Tsai, 2012, p. 166; Prasetyo et al., 2016, p. 37; Shidiqi & Suprapti, 2013, p. 91). So, the three portraits that are often shown in films about bullying can basically symbolize acts of violence that need to be solved immediately. This finding can also convey that American film (with the theme of bullying) tend to portray bullying as a condition identical with physical violence, verbal violence and trauma experienced by an individual (a victim of bullying).

The Conceptualization of Bullying

The theory of representation applied to the analysis of films about bullying has led to the process of interpreting the concept of bullying. It is not only limited to the violent acts toward other people, but the concept of bullying can be explored even more deeply to figure out what is represented by bullying. The results of analysis and interpretation of the data show that basically, bullying can represent three kinds of conditions as presented in the following table:

Table 1. Three Conditions Represented by Bullying

Representation of Bullying	The lack of attention from family
	The social environment
	The powerlessness of individual

From a representational point of view, bullying can construct the three types of conditions above which may also be perceived as factors that trigger for the emergence of bullying behavior in an individual. In other words, when viewed from the perspective of the bully, it can be seen that these three conditions may contribute to the bullying behavior.

a. The Lack of Attention from Family

Attention is generally known as a person's ability to concentrate on someone by involving the learning process for a certain period of time (Fiorentino, 2004, p. 1). The attention discussed in this context is the attention of parents to their children. The link between family and bullying cannot be separated because in reality, family conditions also influence an individual's behavior and way of thinking. Attention from parents in a family, for example in the form of continuous communication is needed by their children during the developmental period (Arifin et al., 2018, p. 934; Asih & Renggani, 2019, p. 180). Family as the smallest community in society is certainly very essential in terms of learning basic values for character building (Iswan et al., 2022, p. 1603). This point provides an explanation that the connection between parents and children is an important key. This means that a good relationship between parent and kids in the form of communication, family discussions, expressions of affection, etc. needs to be taken into account.

For instance, the film *A Girl like Her* (2015) depicts that the bully named Avery regrets her actions and admits her mistake as shown in the following dialog:

Avery: Yeah, but I mean, who would I talk to? I have nobody. My mom doesn't talk to me. My dad doesn't talk. My friends care about real life. They care about shopping.
(01:19:09)

The dialog reveals that the bully has a serious problem in her family. The absence of care and communication between parents and children is the root of various problems and one of them is bullying. The importance of good relations with family members was also

expressed by Thomas et al. (2017, p. 7) who argued that family relations can be useful to help avoid various kinds of emotional problems such as depression and to form good attitudes. Even though in form, the family is small in society, it still has a very significant function in terms of providing a sense of security, educating children, giving affection, providing moral support, and so on (Dale & Smith, 2013, p. 208).

As an example of the importance of family care, the film *Wonder* (2017) portrays a victim of bullying named Auggie who ends up getting an award from his school emphasizing the role his family plays in giving him strength:

Auggie: My dad does for always making us laugh. And my mom does the most. For never giving up. On anything. Especially, me.
(01:4:23)

When it is associated with acts of bullying committed by a child against other children at school, the opinion from Thomas et al. can be used as an essential note for everyone to see the significance of parental attention to their children. What a child does at school should be of concern to parents because this shows that there is good communication between parents and children.

Children who are in disharmonious families without proper communication between parents and children, without advice from parents and without good upbringing, can easily learn bad things and one of them is bullying his or her weaker classmates. In addition, from the psychological perspective, as the most important small group in a society consisting of parents and children, family is basically assessed from the interactions between family members (Popov & Ilesanmi,

2015, p. 255). A bully who vents his dissatisfaction, rage or frustration by bullying his or her schoolmates is a mistake. If this keeps happening, the victim of bullying will probably do the same to other people. It will be seen as a vicious circle that will go on and on. Thus, if the meaning bullying is examined more deeply, the role of family in giving attention to their children would become a key behind the concept of bullying.

b. The Social Environment

When talking about the conceptualizing the term bullying the role of social environment cannot be ruled out because the fact is that bullying really occurs in society. What is meant by the social environment in this context is any situation, atmosphere or around an individual (outside the family) that can influence him or her to commit acts of bullying. Related to the social environment, people often think whether it can affect the behavior or attitude of an individual. Many studies suggested that there is indeed a close relationship between the social environment and a person's behavior. The social environment can usually be perceived as a dynamic condition formed in a society where a group of people join in bringing different background, thoughts, attitude and activities. (Pinoa et al., 2020, p. 36). This condition may affect the way people to behave or act because of the influence of the people around them, for example, hang-out friends, neighbors, schoolmates, etc.

It is said that the social environment plays an essential role in a person's life because according to Dude (2022, p. 44) all stages of a person's life is always affected by his or her relationship with other individuals in society. A student who gets influence from the social

environment can come from anyone. This is also emphasized by Arifin et al. (2018, p. 932) that bad behaviors such as theft, fights, drug abuse, etc. can be influenced by association with wrong friends. Thus, bullying can also be perceived from the same point of view as explained by Arifin et al.

As an example, in the film *Wonder* (2018), a character named Jack befriends the bully Julian. The bully always makes fun of Auggie and Jack is also influenced by Julian joining him on the insults:

Boy: It really does look like him

Julian: This part right?

Boy: Yeah.

Jack: I mean, he's always reminded me of, like, the shrunken head, you know?

Julian: Or an orc.

Boy: Yeah.

Julian: If I look like him, I'd swear I'd put a hood over my face every day.

Jack: If I look like him, I think I'd kill myself.

Julian: Why do you hang out with him so much, Jack?

Jack: Yeah. I dunno. Tushman asked me to be his welcome buddy and now he just follows me around everywhere.

Julian: Well, that must stink!

(00:45:13)

Jack, who at the first did not show a bad attitude towards Auggie, turned out to be influenced by his classmates and took part in insulting Auggie's appearance. The dialog above may indicate that an individual, especially a teenager, can often get negative influence from his friends and it will have an impact on his or her way of thinking, attitudes and behavior. In fact, an individual can get a lot of influence from his or her social environment, especially those related to his or her psychology. Scientific studies have also revealed that whether or not an individual is

mentally healthy may be connected to his or her relationship with other people as well as support from people around him or her (Prasetyo et al., 2016, p. 37). Perhaps it is true that if someone is in a positive social environment, which means that the people around him or her are always well-behaved, caring, giving advice, and carrying out useful activities, he might be influenced to behave like his or her friends too.

Talking about the social environment, the school is also an environment that can contribute to acts of bullying, especially if the one doing the bullying is seniors or teachers. This can give the bully students an idea that school does not mind it, so they can do it freely. Several scenes in the film *Bully* (2011) show that schools or campuses are often negligent or fail to suppress bullying cases and do not even want to be blamed if the bullying takes its toll. Here are some of the dialogs from the film:

Jackie: You send your kids to school with the assumption that if they're out of your care, they're in someone else's who is just as capable as you of keeping them safe, and I don't feel like that. He's not safe on that bus.

Kim: It's hard. It is hard. And you know what? This was my dad on Thursday. This is my granddaughter and her new baby brother. I'd be sitting there, crying, just like you if anything happened to those two kids. We don't want anything to happen to these babies. Any of them. This is totally wrong, totally wrong that this situation would happen. Absolutely. But ...

Jackie: It just seems to me, if it's a few kids, then you take away the few kids.

(01:10:42)

Kelby: And another teacher told me how they burned fags and kept talking about it with me in the classroom, and everyone

was laughing. And they knew it was hurting me, and they kept going.

(00:20:10)

Kelby: Yeah, you know, I went in thinking it was gonna be a new year, and people were used to me. And I went into class, and the class was already full, and I sat down, and everyone around me moved seats. Like every single person. I was the only one sitting in a little circle. That was enough.

(01:25:19)

The dialogs above reflect that the parents of bullying victims were disappointed that schools did not see bullying as something serious. Schools, in this case, teachers also often fail to act to stop bullying and sometimes they are also unable to do much (Veenstra et al., 2014, p. 1136). In other words, bullying will never be overcome if children continue to see various incidents or experience of bullying in their surroundings and society. Therefore, discussions about bullying cannot simply ignore social environment factor. The phenomenon of bullying is not a simple matter because it involves many conditions that cause it to occur. Thus, if it is interpreted from the perspective of representation theory, it is a negative behavior that happens in society and is strongly related to the social environment they bully lives in.

c. The Powerlessness of Individual

Various kinds of conditions can be experienced by people in society. Each of these conditions is closely related to one's emotions. One of the conditions that is actually quite often experienced by many people is a feeling of powerlessness. Power is always perceived as something essential. There are people who have power and there are people who are powerless in society. Thus, according

to Overbeck et al. (2006, p. 480) people who have social power can easily influence others who have no power and the powerless people cannot do the same thing.

Based on the opinion of Wilkinson et al. (2010, p. 910) a number of studies from the social and psychological fields have revealed that power can influence the tendency to behave or do something in social context. The statement from Wilkinson et al. may indicate that individuals who in their daily lives experience pressure from a group of people who are more powerful in society and have no power to fight and only accept it are those who are considered powerless. This point provides an understanding that many teenagers in society have experienced the feeling of being underestimated and they think that they need an action to show that they are superior and powerful. One of the things they do is to bully their classmates who they think to have flaws and weakness to be insulted, made fun of and hurt.

In addition to understanding how feeling of powerlessness can affect a person's life, there is a research conducted by Yang et al. (2015, p. 1) which found that individuals who feel powerless believe that they are seen and treated inhumanely by those who have power and they tend to feel ashamed, disappointed, anxious, angry or anything negative. This condition may lead him or her to do whatever to show his or her existence. So, teenagers who are unable to think positively and control their emotions may feel powerless because they have to follow the rules of house, schools and society. As a result, they will express their feelings of powerlessness in many ways which are generally rebellious, destructive as well as violent.

Emotional outburst due to powerlessness shown by teenagers according to several studies may be related to the search for identity. This condition was also explained by Yanwar et al. (2020, p. 596) that adolescence is perceived as a time when individuals are looking for their identity, for example, looking for answers about who they are, what their life purposes are, what their specialties are, what their position in society is, and so on. This point may reflect that those who bully actually vent their frustration and anger over something that limits their freedom in everyday life but they feel they have no power over it.

CONCLUSION

There are several essential points that can be used as conclusions regarding the study of bullying in American films. First, the issue of bullying still often appears in various media in various places. This is because cases of bullying still occur, especially in schools. Second, cases of bullying are also frequently used as themes in popular American films and for this reason, they deserve to be studied. Third, the results obtained from an analysis of the films about bullying show that there are three portraits related to bullying that often appeared as the scenes of the studied films such as portraits of physical violence, verbal violence (verbal bullying) as well as trauma. Thus, it can indicate that bullying is inseparable from these three portraits. They can be an indication that bullying must be stopped immediately because it not justified and can bring about a bad impact on the victims. Finally, based on Hall's the of representation, American popular culture, especially, Hollywood movies represent bullying as a lack of affection from the family, the social environment and the powerlessness of an individual.

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