



SCOPE

Journal of English Language Teaching

| p-ISSN 2541-0326 | e-ISSN 2541-0334 |
<https://journal.lppmunindra.ac.id/index.php/SCOPE/>



Research Article

Overcoming Cyberbullying with Empathy: The ‘Weirdos’ Film Shows How Patience and Strong Character Matters

Indrani Dewi Anggraini¹, Nani Nuraini Sarah²

^{1,2} Universitas Pamulang,,Jl. Suryakencana no.1, Tangerang Selatan 15436, Indonesia

KEYWORDS

Body shame;
 Bullying;
 Empathy

A B S T R A C T

Bullying seriously violates the ethics of human relations. It is a serious problem that affects the mental health of young people, and sadly at times, it can even result in the tragic death of the victims. The act of bullying in the form of gossiping, mocking, laughing at them, or even "seemingly harmless" physical acts, is often not taken seriously and is even interpreted as an act of joking. These acts are often felt by victims as deeply disturbing as they suffer from physical pain and mental anguish due to body shame as is seen in the film "Weirdos". This study aims to describe, to analyze, and to interpret critically the film based on the aspects of the victim's character-building through traits that range from empathy, passion, and patience to stop the tyranny of bullying. Using the descriptive and qualitative method with an eclectic approach and content analysis, the data of this study were selected from film's sceneries. The results of this study show that being empathy namely patience and passion, bullying can be overcome. Apart from this, these positive traits might lead to a greater awareness of how certain virtues of victims and their strength of character can overcome bullying. Finally, this study promotes film as a means of educational media to spread awareness of the impacts of bullying.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR(S):

E-mail: dosen00113@unpam.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Bullying, which essentially violates the ethics of human relations, is a serious problem that affects the mental development of young students. It can even result in the tragic death of the victim. An eleven-year-old boy tragically committed suicide after being forced by his friends to have sex with a cat in Tasikmalaya, West Java reported on detikNews in 2022.

It has become one of the many extraordinary cases that have emerged a few years ago. After experiencing bullying beyond the limits of humanity, the victim became depressed and died because of it. Bullying can be done

sadistically, while the bullies do not take it seriously. It can cause death for the victim. The bullies consider their actions as jokes, challenges, and adventures.

Research on this issue has been widely published since the late 1990s (Berger, 2007), which shows that bullying behavior is caused by students' emotional levels that are still unstable. This instability causes them to find an identity that is unstable, popular, and false. This kind of identity can be physical beauty, which is popular as a standard of beauty constructed by patriarchal communities. Research on bullying in Scandinavian countries explains the effects of aggressive behavior on children who engage in and experience bullying (Lagerspetz, Bjokqvist, Berts, & King, 1982; Olweus, 2003). Focusing on differences in

individual behavior, most studies in America provided insight into differences in social conditions and social relationships. This difference in social background resulted in more detrimental behavior compared to their well-adjusted counterparts. In other words, the difference in social background among students exacerbates class-based bullying.

The recent bullying incidents have been deeply concerning by all levels of society, requiring serious attention and handling from all components of the nation by using various methods. One of the entertaining methods for teenagers to get meaningful lessons about bullying is through movies. The issues represented in the films can become a lesson for the bully and the bullied. This research focuses on the representation of the issues of bullying shown in the educational film "Weirdos" consisting of 5 episodes. It provides a better understanding of the consequences of bullying tyranny and the solution to stop it for bullies and victims.

Several researchers on bullying films have been dominated by fictional films such as *The Greatest Showman*, *The IT*, and *The Joker*. The first study written by Tjitra, Budiana, and Wijayanti (2022) indicating that bullying occurs because of differences in physical and social status. Apart from this, the influence of the mass media takes part in bullying. The ideologies found in this research are egalitarianism, liberalism, and capitalism. Meanwhile, the second study conducted by Reskiani et al. (2021) show that the environment where a child lives might cause bullying and influence his/her personality. The third study revealed by Atika (2020) demonstrated that bullying was caused by the circumstances of the family, economics, society, and education.

The three studies used the descriptive qualitative method based on a semiotic approach. They show similarities in their results namely the relationship of bullying to politics, power, violence, and the impacts of bullying on adolescents. Meanwhile, in this study, the researchers found a relationship between bullying to body shame, daughter-mother psychological problems, and cyberbullying.

"Weirdos", is a realist film series performed by teenage actresses raising the issues of the tyranny of bullying by friends in college and how to stop it through behavior that reflects patience and determination to maintain self-esteem. Throughout the film series, the characters demonstrate growth. The character's building is strongly shown in this film series. Due to this empathy based on affection and patience, the tyranny of the bullying changes into a warm friendship. In this present study, the researchers aim to explore and interpret the causes and

effects of bullying related to the empathy that overcomes the tyranny of bullying.

METHOD

This research applied the descriptive qualitative method by applying the eclectic and content analysis approach. The qualitative descriptive method refers to the focus on understanding a phenomenon by examining its characteristics and qualities on bullying. It is used to explore the topic of bullying in depth to gain a better understanding of a previously studied topic by applying different perspectives. This type of research explored the phenomenon's characteristics, rather than explaining the underlying causes or mechanism. The data sources of this study refer to the sceneries of the six series film "Weirdos". It involves the collection and data analysis in the form of words, images, or other non-numerical forms or information. In other words, this descriptive qualitative method provides a great opportunity to create alternative, critical, and meaningful interpretations (Sobur, 2014).

To analyze the above data, this study applied the content analysis approach. The content of the film series indicated the issues of the tyranny of bullying. This content was analyzed and interpreted by various theories. The theories used were the theories on bullying, the Beauty Myths, and Character building.

According to Haryana (2018), bullying is unpleasant behavior both verbally, physically, and socially in the real world and the virtual world that makes a person feel uncomfortable, hurt, and depressed both by individuals and groups. Bullying is considered to have occurred when a person feels uncomfortable and hurt by what other people have done to him. Bullying can be likened to the seed of many other forms of violence, for example, brawls, intimidation, beatings, and even murders. Further, Olweus (2003), mentioned that there are 5 factors that cause perpetrators to commit acts of bullying: 1) The perpetrator was a victim of bullying, 2) Revenge 3) Demonstrating self-existence, 4) Wanting to get recognition, and 5) Cover up its shortcomings. Victims of bullying are also characterized by cautious, sensitive, and reserved behavior (Olweus, 2003). Furthermore, Astuti (2008) described victims of bullying as showing the characteristics of being stupid, shy, not confident, less than perfect, stuttering, has an imperfect body, which indicates body shame.

Regarding the imperfect body, Wolf (1991) mentioned that women who do not fulfill the beauty standards are regarded as failures. They are considered the "other" and positioned to be marginalized. On the other hand, those women who are slim, pretty, and have proportional sexy appearances are considered to fulfill the beauty standards. They are

successful, superior, popular, and leading. They put themselves better than the other women who are fat, ugly, and unpopular. Their superiority might lead to bullying unstandardized women.

Harani, Sholihah, Indrawa, and Dewi (2021) cited Imam Al Haddad's concept of patience as a character building, believing that all conditions with good patience will produce goodness. Patience is one of the characteristics that must be continuously trained continuously by students. In the attitude of patience, there is self-control. This value is above the average human nature in general. This character reflects the strength of a person's soul in facing the problems of his life. Being patient makes students more responsible for themselves and their own behavior. Patience leads to good deeds including stopping misdeeds such as bullying.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of this study shows that biological, psychological, and revenge factors are the main causes of bullying that affect bullies and victims. Furthermore, the empathy based on patience, and passion leads to the solution to the tyranny of the bullying.

Bullying involves two parties, the bully and the bullied. In "The Weirdos" film series, Everly, Mia, and Jax are the ones who bully, Charlotte and Samantha as the victims of bullying. The biological factor causing the bullying by Mia and Everly is their physical appearance. Meanwhile, psychological factors are related to problematic mother-daughter relationships.

Biological Factors/Physical Appearance

Everly and Mia have slim and slender bodies, as well as beautiful faces. With beautiful and sexy bodies, they have advantages in terms of physique and beauty. They position themselves more superior than Charlotte who is fat and clumsy. As stated by Astuti (2008) the imperfect body leads to bullying, like what is experienced by Charlotte. Further, Olewues (2003) stated that the bullies do the bullying in order to be recognized. Everly and Mia want to be recognized as beautiful, slim, sexy women, and popular. These lead to arrogance and aggressiveness to Everly and Mia by bullying Charlotte verbally, physically, socially, and virtually.

In the film, it is shown that body shame is a factor causing bullying.



Figure 1. Charlotte's body is compared to Mia's and Everly's

Charlotte with her obesity feels ashamed as she does not fulfill the beauty standards. On the other hand, Everly and Mia meet the standards. They feel superior to Charlotte. The arrogance of Everly and Mia makes them look down on others who are not slim, beautiful, and popular. Charlotte's imperfect body always gets ridiculed, by calling Charlotte's name "Piggy" referring to a pig. The connotation of this word indicates the image of fat, dirty, unhealthy, and dumb. Charlotte is victimized by bullying caused by her imperfect body by the bullies who consider themselves a perfect beautiful body and good-looking.

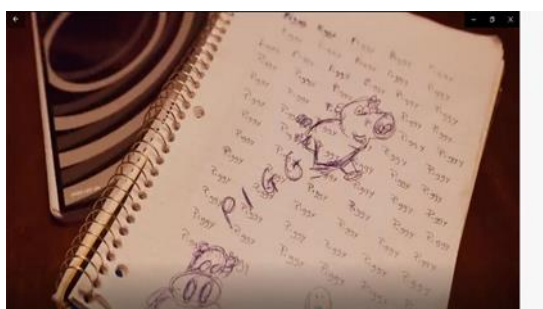


Figure 2. Charlotte is verbally bullied by being called Piggy

Psychological Factors/ Disharmonious Family Relationships

Bullying can be caused by family disharmony, especially with the mother. Several episodes of the film "Weirdos" showed an inharmonious relationship between the daughter's mother. In their family relationship, Everly and Mia get psychological pressure from their relationship with their mothers. Everly always gets under pressure from the condition of his mother who suffers from a long-time illness called Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), a neurological disorder that can get worse over time, causing paralysis. This serious illness is rarely recovered. Everly has stressful inner conflict as she is by herself taking care of her mother, while she is struggling to finish her studies that acquire financial expenditures as well as for her mother's medications.

Experiencing such a situation, Everly feels aggravated, sad, and anxious. Her mother, the person closest to her, is in a state of physical and mental weakness. She loses the

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30998/scope.v8i1.19519>

sense of security, peace, and joy with her mother's chronic and incurable disease. She suppresses her negative feelings of sadness, and anxiety in front of her mother so that her mother would not know her true state or get involved in Everly's stress. This pressure makes Everly psychologically weak. This weakness is compensated by bullying based on her slimness and beauty. By bullying Charlotte, Everly feels stronger and superior. Moreover, she aggressively bullies Charlotte who is weak and inferior to her obese body.

Mia also experiences psychological pressures causing friction relationship with her stepmother. Mia does not get attention, affection, and warmth from her stepmother who is ignored by her husband. Mia is enforced as a servant rather than as a daughter. Mia gets a hurting reprimand from her stepmother if Mia doesn't do the chores in the house that cater to her stepmother's needs. Mia, who has a disease congenital (severe allergy to peanuts) is intentionally unnoticed by her stepmother. Even Mia is considered to be boasting and looking for excuses to household duties in serving his stepmother. Mia is stressed by this disharmonious relationship with her stepmother. This grief makes Mia weak, worried, and depressed.

The pressure and sadness experienced by Everly and Mia cause them to seek compensation in order to escape from their psychological sufferings. The agony from the pressures of their family circumstances takes the form of bullying towards Charlotte who has a weak factor in her obesity viewed from the concept of beauty standards forward by Naomi Woolf.

The Revenge Factor

Bullying is also done as an attempt of revenge. Charlotte physically bullies Everly by cutting Everly's hair as revenge for her being bullied by Everly and Mia. Charlotte, as a victim of bullying, cuts Everly's hair, as revenge for her having used gum stuck in her hair. However, this bullying as revenge is not sustainable, because Charlotte realizes that bullying is bad behavior. Her self-consciousness on the tyranny of bullying leads her to strengthen her patience in facing the other bullying done by Everly and Mia.

The Impact of Bullying on Victims and on Bullies

The victims of bullying always face extraordinary discrimination and pressure from bullies or from the community around them. Generally, she or he feels uncomfortable and struggles to recover from the actions of the bully but rarely stands up to them. The victims often experience ongoing stress and depression and may

sometimes have suicidal thoughts and even commit suicide.

In several episodes in the "Weirdos" film, Charlotte often exhibits body language that suggests she is rarely confident in herself. She rarely puts up much resistance against her attackers, often tends to withdraw, often expressing anxiety and that she is inferior in new situations. In class, she often prefers to sit in the back row or choose to sit alone in the school canteen. She appears unhappy at school and has few friends. One positive aspect of Charlotte's character is that her enthusiasm for learning has not been diminished notwithstanding the bullying. It could be that she has high aspirations to become a medical doctor like her parents. Somehow she retains a strong inner motivation and her patience to achieve her dream in spite of being subjected to ongoing bullying.

Nevertheless, Charlotte often feels sad, develops a sense of inferiority, and cries as a result of the initial bullying that relates to her being overweight. With such a figure, she feels that she does not meet the contemporary beauty standards for women where slim, slender, and sexy women tend to be idealized. Consequently, those who do not meet these standards often are marginalized, scorned, and bullied. This was Charlotte's experience as she is often mocked and called "Piggy".

Bullies are confident because they think that they are physically strong and beautiful and they enjoy being popular with their peers (Sullivan, 2000). They often show aggressive behavior to dominate social life in their peers or at school (Sullivan, 2000). In the case of Charlotte, her bullies often make sneering comments at her. This verbal bullying comes later on with physical bullying in the form of kicking and pushing. Then one day, they flush her precious drawing book down the toilet and pour water onto Charlotte's pants to make it look as if she had peed in her pants. At the same time, the bullies took photos of her with the wet pants on which is then posted over the internet and spread using social media.

This incident affected her a great deal. While at times Charlotte tries to have to stand up for herself but the bullying continues. The never-ending takes their toll on Charlotte's mental health but she keeps quiet, tries to be patient, and holds back her emotions. She becomes less social and further withdraws from the few friends that she has. Now research has shown that bullying has a variety of psychological impacts on victims who often keep silent and stay patient in the face of constant bullying. But at some point, the victims conversely can become aggressive and even act violently because the victim feels that the perpetrator has undermined the victim's self-esteem and deserves revenge (Olweus, 2003)



Figure 3. Charlotte is showing her aggressiveness

In the face of their victim's suffering, bullies remain callous as they have difficulty in empathizing with their victims (Sullivan, 2000). They often purposely create trouble with their victims or try to find fault in their victims and prefer to act in groups to have support and backup from others as a way to affirm that what they are doing is "right". Moreover, seeing that a group is involved in the bullying process, bystanders tend to stay on the side lines and are reluctant to get involved or to assist Charlotte. Students who witness the acts of bullying have an important role in stopping these acts, but most don't do it. Instead, most just watch while some others join in the bullying as fun entertainment and laugh at Charlotte.

One publication of several authors (Haynie, 2001) stated that perpetrators of bullying show poor psychosocial functioning and are often even worse than their victims. The levels of depression experienced by perpetrators are often higher than those of their victims. High depression can form a frontal attitude that harms people around the bullies. Nevertheless, some perpetrators even feel innocent about their rude behavior. The bullying behavior can be caused by a disharmonious family relationship that affects their emotional relationship with their family. This apparently had happened to both Everly and Mia as their problematic psychological mother-daughter relationship led them to become aggressive bullies.

Perpetrators of bullying, however, can suddenly and unexpectedly switch their position to become a victim of their own bullying or as a result of bad things that happened to them unexpectedly. They can also switch from being bullies once they witness acts of empathy or compassion be towards themselves or towards their family.

One day in an act of kindness notwithstanding all the bullying acts that she had to endure, Charlotte offers Everly's mother some medical assistance for her ALS illness. Charlotte also shows her extraordinary patience and empathy. It is also demonstrated when Mia's relapse condition comes about as she is out of breath caused of her allergic reaction. Mia then faints but is revived and saved

by Charlotte's quick response by giving her injections as first aid. In both situations, Charlotte is patient and shows extraordinary compassion towards Everly and Mia. However, when the school finds out about the cyberbullying incidents involving spreading pictures showing Charlotte wetting her pants, Everly and Mia are suspended by the Head of the school. Based on Charlotte's empathy, the suspense is canceled by her actions in abolishing the evidence of Mia and Everly's bullying. In other words, Charlotte forgives them and because of this Everly and Mia can still continue their study. Finally, Everly and Mia repent their wrongdoings. Charlotte's patience and affection change their callous bullying habit. As a result, a new warm and understanding friendship is eventually formed among them.

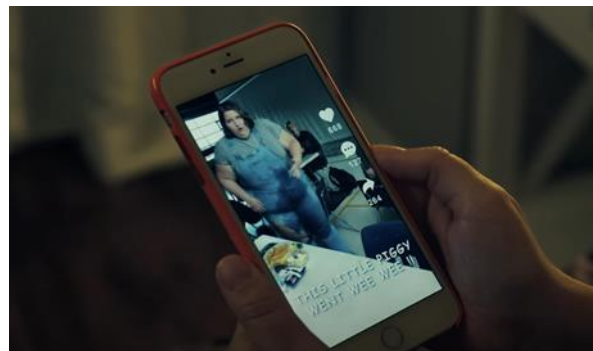


Figure 4. Charlotte is the victim of Cyberbully.

CONCLUSION

Cyberbullying spreads images and news to many more people and becomes difficult to control. Perpetrators can portray negative images of victims such that victims of this type of bullying end up with serious psychological distress such as deep depression.

From the perpetrator's side, the motivation for bullying can come from the need to compensate for their lack of warm mother's love. The bullies are under psychological pressure from their mothers. Both characters feel that they are in an unhappy and vulnerable state. As a result, they try to compensate for these states expressed by a sense of superiority derived from physical conditions and beauty that meets the standards of beauty. Because of this superiority, they bully the victim physically and mentally.

From the bullied side who possesses empathy based on patience, passion, and helpfulness. The victim turns aggressive because she feels that her self-esteem has been ruined by the spread virally through cyberbullying as an action of revenge. In other words, bullying can be countered by further bullying and this vicious cycle can be continued. This chain of bullying however might be able to be stopped with greater self-awareness on the part of one of the parties to stop the cycle. Apart from this, influential

and authoritative outsiders contribute to stopping the bullying.

In essence, this film tries to tell a lesson that not all crimes must be repaid with evil. By being empathic to the perpetrators, even though she has been humiliated, the bullying is stopped.

The empathic feelings succeed in making the bullies feel ashamed of their despicable acts. Apart from portraying a perfect protagonist, this film is also able to show to the audience that eventually bullies can have a heart and that they can adopt a more positive behavior and set a positive example for the audience. The bullies and the bullied forgive each other.

This positive ending suggests that character-building can take place. This serial can be used as a reference for youth and even adults; so that bullying can be stopped and replaced with interactions that are more positive and creative. The acts and the underlying values displayed in the serial "Weirdos" can be exemplary and should be adopted by the younger generation in the process of living their lives in the 21st century if they wish to create a more harmonious and amicable community.

REFERENCE

- Astuti, P. R. (2008). *Meredam Bullying 3 Cara Efektif KPA (Kekerasan Pada Anak)*. Jakarta: Grasindo.
- Atika, F. N. (2020). Representasi bullying dalam film *Joker*. *Jurnal Digilib UIN Sunan Ampel*. http://digilib.uinsby.ac.id/44656/2/Fadhila%20Nuru1%20Atika_B76216055.pdf
- Berger, S. K. (2007). Update on bullying at school: Science forgotten? *Dev. Rev.* 27: 90–126.
- Harani, M. N., Sholihah, E., Indrawa, & Dewi (2021). Konsep pendidikan karakter menurut imam Al-haddad dan relevansinya dengan pendidikan karakter di Indonesia. *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam dan Multikulturalisme*, 3(2), 123-134. <https://ejournal.insuriponorogo.ac.id/index.php/scaffolding/article/view/1153/65>
- Haryana, D. (2018). *Stop Perundungan*. Jakarta. Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
- Haynie, D. L. (2001). Bullies, victims, and bully/victim: Distinct group of At-Risk Youth. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 21(1), 29 - 49.
- Lagerspetz, K. M. J, Bjorkqvist, K., Berts, M., & King, E. (1982). Group aggression among school children in three schools. *Scand. J. Psychol*, 23, 45-52.
- Olweus, D. (2003). *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*. USA. Blackwell Publishing.
- Reskiani, G. P., et al. (2021). Representasi bullying dalam film *IT*. *e-Jurnal, Ilmu Komunikasi*, 9(2), 84-93. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1qm8o67XDi6gmdBGrwn10ADrChUWooUXe>
- Sobur, A. (2014). *Komunikasi Naratif: Paradigma, Analisis, dan Aplikasi: Rosdakarya*, Bandung.
- Sullivan, K. (2000). *The Anti Bullying Handbook*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tjitra, A. C., Budiana, D., & Wijayanti, C. A. (2022). Representasi bullying dalam film *The Greatest Showman*. *Jurnal E-Komunikasi*, 1(10), 1 <https://publication.petra.ac.id/index.php/ilmu-komunikasi/article/view/12202>
- Weirdos Episode 1: https://youtu.be/cFsQjM3_wWU
- Weirdos Episode 2: <https://youtu.be/D4ryeDa4yw0>
- Weirdos Episode 3: <https://youtu.be/keVa8qsLdWA>
- Weirdos Episode 4: <https://youtu.be/EP7btg6Wg6E>
- Weirdos Episode 5: <https://youtu.be/EP7btg6Wg6E>
- Wolf, N. (1991). *Beauty Myth*. Niagara USA. (<https://news.detik.com/berita/d-6199071/kasus-anak-dipaksa-perkosa-kucing-waket-mpr-kecam-jalur-damai>)