European Journal of Innovation in Nonformal Education (EJINE)
Volume 5| Issue 4 | April -2025 ISSN: 2795-8612

School Bullying and Its Impact on the Development of Young People A Case Study: Robert Cormier's Novel *The Chocolate War* (1974)

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A B S T R A C T

School bullying has been concerning parents and educators for several decades. Previous research has indicated potential associations between aggressiveness and health problems. Although several prevention programs are being implemented worldwide, studies show that aggressive behaviour among youth is not decreasing. The review of the research has shown that the contribution of literary fiction is significant in preventing bullying and increasing the level of empathy among school children. However, previous studies of bullying participants have not addressed how they are represented in fiction. Thus, this study set out to investigate a literary work to illustrate the adverse impact bullying may have on its participants in the example of the literary work. This study set out to determine whether there is a correlation between bullying and the mental health of a young person. The research is based on the analysis of Robert Cormier's 1974 novel *The Chocolate War*. First, the article discusses three types of bullying participants: bully, victim, and bystander, and distinguishes their characteristic features. Then, the impact of aggressive action on the mental health of the bully, victim, and bystander is discussed. Next, the author examines whether the novel's heroes have similar features to bullying participants, and the impact on the bullying participants is investigated. The analysis of the bullying impact reflected in the novel *The Chocolate War* shows the level of impact of bullying on victim and bystander – the repeatedly victimized protagonist by peers and teachers lost their confidence and belief in fairness, while a witness, being a friend of the protagonist, who does not intervene feels guilt which led to anxiety and depression..

A R T I C L E I N F O

Article history:
Received *02Feb2025*
Received *in revised form 03Mar2025*
Accepted *04Apr2025*

Keywords: *bullying, American literature, teenager, young adults' novel*

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying among children at school, as a social and psychological phenomenon, has a long history. However, it has not been under investigation until the recent time in the mid-1970s. Though there are several anti-bullying and anti-mobbing programs, and they are being implemented worldwide, the problem still exists, and school-age children of the school-age are being victimized. According to UNICEF statistics, 130 million children aged 13-15 are exposed to bullying, and every 7 minutes, an adolescent is killed in the act of violence (UNICEF, 2017). Several studies indicate that aggressors are mostly boys (Garaigordobil & Oñederra, 2008), and this study shows that most cases of bullying happen among classmates. Olweus differentiates the types of bullying between girls and boys. Boys tend to have physical aggression, while girls tend to have an indirect way of harassment. Olweus states that weaker and younger people are more exposed to bullying (Olweus, 1993).

Along with the negative impact on a child's academic performance, several mental and psychological disorders result from repeated bullying. Salmivalli (2010) states that due to the aggression, victims become more depressed and their self-esteem decreases, while being the only victim in the class leads to maladjustment (cited in Salmivalli, 2010). Peer abuse may even lead to youth suicide (Carrera et al., 2011), and victimized youth are "at greater risk for poor psychosocial outcomes" (Green et al., 2013). It has been argued that bullying occurs due to poor adult supervision (Feder, 2007) and underreporting of the victims (cited in Feder, 2007). UNICEF reports state that victims' reluctance to report their problem is a crucial reason for aggression (UNICEF, 2017).

BULLYING AND ITS IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS

A plethora of studies noted the relationship between bullying and the health problems of each participant, including bully, victim, and bystander (Natvig et al., 2001; Karatas & Ozturk, 2011). Loeber & Dihion, Magnusson

et al. predicted the increasing risk of criminal involvement of those with aggressive Behaviour in childhood (cited in Olweus, 1993). Olweus post-study results proved that a significant proportion of children who were characterized as bullies while at school became crime convicts in their adulthood. Literature shows that boys who were frequently bullied others in their childhood tend to "commit violent, property, traffic, and drunk driving offences" and become recidivists in their late adolescence (Sourender et al., 2007, p.549). Several studies found that both bullies and victims frequently have a severe "suicidal ideation" among girls, while most of the boys-bullies were associated with the same problem (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 1999, p. 349; cited in Baiden & Tadeo, 2009). Skapinakis et al. found that "suicidal ideation" is closely associated with being bullied and dominating among boys (2011, p. 15).

Findings show that bullying can have a long-lasting effect on those persistently victimized even after school completion. Olweus (1993), in his study, identified former victims who progressed much worse than those who had not been, and they tend to be more depressed and have poor self-esteem in adulthood. Several studies indicate the correlation between anxiety and depression and being bullied (Salmon et al., 1998; Katiala-Heino et al., 1999; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Averdijk et al., 2011). Both bully and victim were found to have a high level of "psychiatric symptoms," predicting later crimes (Sourander et al., 2007, p. 549).

Also, research shows that a significant number of students who observed aggressive behaviour towards their peers experienced "psychological symptoms", "somatic symptoms", "low life satisfaction, and not having excellent health (Callaghan et al., 2019, p. 418). It has also been identified that the bystander witnessing the bullying action may experience an emotional disturbance as a result. For example, «self-blame and feelings of guilt" (Adewoye & Plessis, 2021, p. 42), the emotions bystanders usually feel for not being able to intervene in the aggressive action and defend the victim. The same study found that "biased interpretation" of their experience of bullying action by bystanders led to their "psychological re-victimization" (Adewoye & Plessis, 2021, pp. 44-45)

OBSERVATION OF BULLYING IN LITERATURE

In major YA books depicting bullying as the main problem, the main protagonists are teenagers studying either in middle school or high school. Due to both girls and boys being exposed to bullying, both genders are depicted in the YA novels. Bullying as a group was explicitly depicted in Hinton's novel *The Outsiders* (1967), in which two groups of young people with significantly different social statuses fight against each other. Another novel depicting this problem is Robert Lipsyte's *One Fat Summer* (1977). The main hero, Bobby, suffers from obesity and is frequently bullied by his peers for his "abnormal" appearance. Among several recent books raising the problem of children's aggressive behaviour are Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007), James Peller's *Bystander* (2009), Julie Anne Peters' *By The Time You Read This I'll Be Dead* (2010), Eric Kahn Gale's *The Bully Book* (2013).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Although the studies on bullying exist, not enough is being done to reduce it in schools. Many children are still being exposed to aggressive attitudes across the world. Once a child enters the school environment, they try to establish a relationship with their peers. It was found that this relationship may positively or negatively affect the child and "have the potential to contribute to the child's sense of well-being and social competence" (UNICEF, 2017). This phenomenon is also becoming more vivid with increasing social status differences between youth.

Moreover, another reason is the low involvement of educators in the upbringing and raising a sense of respect and empathy in students. Furthermore, a reason can be victims' low self-esteem, leading them to blame themselves for their peers' ambivalent attitudes towards them. In addition, when the cases are being reported, little is done to prevent the cases by teachers and other school administrators. Most cases remain unsolved until the victim graduates or leaves school.

Literature is investigated to gain images of three types of bullying participants, namely, bully, victim, and bystander, and to see the impact of the aggressive actions on each of them. Moreover, we intend to discuss the hero who silently resists bullying without informing or asking for assistance from anyone, such as parents, teachers, and friends. The current study also focuses on analysing the impact of aggression on event participants, including the bully, victim, and bystander, discussed in the example of the 1974 literary work *The Chocolate War*, written by Robert Cormier.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The issue of bullying is not generally focused on in the secondary and higher education teaching curriculum. The research noted that teachers are primarily unaware of ways of intervention and their importance (Rigby, 2011). Another study in the Netherlands found that teachers can reduce victimisation (Fekkes et al., 2005, p. 86) due to its frequent occurrence while children are at school. However, since most cases remain silent and unreported, they cannot identify and, as a result, do not intervene in aggressive actions. This study will raise teachers' awareness of the effects bullying may have on its participants to reduce bullying incidents in their schools. Also, it can be used by educators to teach morality, and self- and peer respect; in addition, the extracts from the book used in the study may be applied for educational purposes in classes. The study will illustrate the adverse effects of bullying on its

participants, namely, the person who is bullied, the person who bullies others, and the one who witnesses the aggression and does not intervene or partially intervene. The article will also discuss the destructive role of a teacher in students' mental health. Also, the study discusses the consequences of the "silence" of the bullied and witnesses/bystanders. For this study, Robert Cormier's book *The Chocolate War* (1974) was selected purposefully since the main character never complains about being bullied by someone from his environment. Before diving into the analysis of the novel and the impact of bullying reflected in it, we find it important to define the concepts of bullying, bully, victim, and bystander, and see the results of studies about the impact of bullying on all three participants.

So to investigate the impact of bullying on its participants reflected in the novel under investigation, we set the following questions:

1. To what extent are the heroes of the novel affected by the bullying process?
2. How does the author illustrate the impact of the school authority on the creation and development of a young personality?

METHODOLOGY

BULLIES' BEHAVIOUR REFLECTION IN THE NOVEL *THE CHOCOLATE WAR*

The novel illustrates several antagonists, who regularly victimise the protagonist. Analysing the novel's antagonist, Archie Costello, the lead bully and manipulator, we can see that he enjoys seeing people hurt. He knows what will cause pain to everyone around him and manipulates it. For example, he victimises Jerry, a victim-hero, and arranges everything to spoil his school and home life. He also comes up with 'stupid' assignments and forces everyone to complete these tasks to show the status of the Vigils and his own. Examples can be losing the screws in the furniture to destroy the classroom, forcing Jerry to reject selling chocolates for ten days, and disrupting Brother Jacques' lesson to discourage him from pronouncing the word 'environment'. As a regular bully, Archie has no sense of respect for either his peers or teachers. He anticipates his teacher's destruction when he assigns Ronald Goubert to loosen all the screws in furniture in Brother Eugene's room, which leads to his nervous breakdown of the latter. During the dialogue with Brother Leon, the master of the school, Archie discourteously leaves the room, embarrassing the teacher.

Another teacher who became Archie's victim is Brother Jacques. His lesson is destroyed due to the assignment to "suddenly erupt into a confusion of waving arms and jogging legs" when Brother Jacques pronounces the word "environment" (Cormier, 2004, p.126). He even victimises the headmaster of the school, Brother Leon, as he knows all his faults, and though he is the person who can stand for him. This bully is characterised not by his physical power but by his wittiness and ability to make intelligent statements that frighten his peers. His victimisation is featured by its psychological impact on the person rather than its physical impact. Having high self-esteem and the intention to establish high status amongst peers, Archie feels resentment when Brother Leon tries to humiliate him in front of his peers.

Brother Leon is another evil in the school. Deceptive, sarcastic, and smirking in classes, he even "looks like henpecked husband, pushover, sucker" (Cormier, 2004, p. 24). When in class, Leon wanders around in search of a victim, someone weaker, and generally, and often succeeds. Having found the victim, he tries to humiliate it by any means, thereby increasing his status and pride. A similar example is his bullying of an excellent student, Bailey. Brother Leon feels enjoyment when he sees the humiliation of a person; a good example of it can be his attack against Bailey and his satisfaction by making him scared and embarrassed.

Brother Leon controls the whole campaign of selling chocolate. His only aim is to sell the product at all costs, and he does not care about his students' and teachers' well-being. He, with Archie, has mutual peer benefit, Archie with Vigils supporting him in selling chocolate, while Leon, being a schoolmaster, ignores all Archie's deeds. However, Leon, who is used to everyone's obedience, is shocked by Jerry's public refusal, which means the failure of his status.

The third initiator of aggressive bullying in the novel is Emile Janza. His manner and behaviour genuinely represent those of bullies. He was a brute, "an animal who didn't play by the rules" (Cormier, 2004, p. 47). He feels enjoyment when destroying the environment. For example, he steals and whistles in the class "so that it got on the teacher's nerves" (Cormier, 2004, p. 47), and sits in a place where it is convenient to "harass teachers" (Cormier, 2004, p. 47). He harasses teachers and his peers, vandalises property, intimidates first-year students, and forces them to find money to get a pack of cigarettes.

THE CHARACTERS OF THE VICTIMS AND BYSTANDERS IN THE NOVEL

Throughout the plot, Jerry, a 14-year-old school student, is constantly being victimized by the three abovementioned bullies. Jerry's problem is reinforced as he prefers to keep silent about being victimized from the story's beginning. Jerry feels lonely at home and at school. He suffers from loneliness for several reasons. He is

distant from his father, though physically, they stand "side by side" (scene during his mother's funeral), and after his mother's recent death, he does not have any friends at school. His father is immersed in work and is not interested in Jerry's life, which contrasts with how the hero describes his deceased mother. Later, with the development of the plot, we can observe how the whole situation affects Jerry. He has insomnia, wakes up at midnight, thinks about being buried alive or with some signs of life in the brain, is wet with sweat, trembling from fea,r and suffocating, and losing the sense of dream and reality. At this moment, he wishes he could escape as "cruelty sickened" (Cormier, 2004, p. 136) the main hero. He receives an assignment from Archie to reject selling chocolates for ten consecutive days. It isolates him from his peers in the school, as all of his peers are actively involved in the school's project.

Moreover, he must keep it a secret and can hardly share it with his single friend, Goubert, which makes him even more lonely. Accomplishing the task of the Vigil and not that one of Brother Leon, he feels guilty. When we compare Archie and Jerry, several similarities are apparent. Both heroes have poor psychological health, and they both have negative emotions towards their families.

As mentioned above aggressiveness of peers may negatively affect the witnesses of the action, regardless of the level of engagement and participation in it themselves. Roland Goubert is a silent observer of the whole situation, even though he is Jerry's only friend at school. He tries to support Jerry and suggests he sell chocolate as other children do to stop the conflict with Brother Leon. The reader can observe Goubert's support of Jerry; however, he never reports Jerry's victimisation to anyone. He could have stopped everything if he had reported the situation to the school or informed Jerry's father. He cannot resist the power of Archie and the Vigils and is involved inthe Vigil's bullying against the school.

Goubert becomes famous among schoolchildren after an incident in Brother Eugene's class, though he is an instrument of the Vigils' deeds. However, the glory did not last long. After two days, Ronald Goubert feels isolated from his classmates and other peers. He sees they are trying to avoid contact or communication with him. Gradually, remorse of conscience begins to exhaust him. He is traumatised and cannot forgive himself for withholding the Vigils' assignment and not resisting instead. The following extract from Chapter Thirteen can be an illustration of what Goubert feels:

"The Goober was depressed, thinking about school spirit. Ever since Room Nineteen had collapsed, he had lived in a state of mild shock. He awoke each morning depressed, knowing even before he opened his eyes that something went wrong, something had gone askew in his life."

(Cormier, 2004, p. 78)

In Chapter Eight, the author compares two states of Goubert's being: happy and depressed. The chapter begins with the character's description of when he runs and the activity, he is the best in the whole school. When he runs, he feels happy and satisfied; the description says, *"he forgot about his acne and his awkwardness and the shyness that paralyzed him when a girl looked his way"* (Cormier, 2004, p. 51). The contrasting image can be seen when he enters room Nineteen and sees the consequences of the assignment he fulfilled:

"But he wasn't running now. He was in Brother Eugen's homeroom, and he was terrified. He was fifteen years old and six-one-and-a-half and too old to cry, but tears blurred his vision as if the room was underwater. he was ashamed and disgusted with himself, but he couldn't help it".

(Cormier, 2004, p. 52)

His guilt chases him, and he becomes stressed due to his disappointment with the school and its system. Eventually, Goubert quits the football team, even though he is one of Trinity School's most effective runners and players. He thinks he has no other choice.

Obbie, the secondary character of the novel, whom the reader is introduced to at the beginning of the second chapter. Obbie has his position among the Vigils. He plays the Vigils' secretary, is involved in all their dirty dealings, and controls the accomplishment of all assignments. He is an active bystander who hates his role ,even though he has been under the 'protection' of the Vigils, hates serving Archie, and hates what the Vigils do. An example from the book illustrates this:

"Obbie was bored. Worse than bored. He was disgusted. He was also tired. It seemed he was always tired these days. He went to bed tired and he woke up tired. He found himself yawning constantly. most of all, he was tired of Archie."

*(*Cormier, 2004, p. 8)

However, his 'devotion' to the Vigils shows that either he fears them, or he is not intelligent and brave enough to get out of their gang. Sometimes he argues with Archie and gets angry that Archie always outdoes him in any argument. Obbie feels empathy for Jerry from the beginning, and he finds it inhumane to involve him as he is young and has recently lost his mother. Obbie is not a passive observer and witness, as he is open about disliking Archie's deeds, but he never manages to resist Archie. Later in Chapter 20, the author states:

"In fact, he'd been tired of being the fixer, making certain the assignments went off on schedule in order to maintain Archie's big shot reputation" (Cormier, 2004, p. 126)

THE IMPACT OF BULLYING ON VICTIM AND BYSTANDER

Goubert is a character who can be described as a witness-bully. To avoid becoming a victim, he prefers to become a bully. As a result, Goubert becomes isolated, loses his sleep at night because of depression, and blames

himself for Brother Eugene's nervous breakdown. Goubert wonders whether he could ever be in a good mood again; everything reminds him of his misery, not to mention Archie and his assignment. The situation reduces his self-esteem, and eventually, he quits his football team and stops running for school. Due to the nervous breakdown, he disappears at the novel's end.

On the other hand, Goubert is a passive bystander, witnessing Jerry's victimisation and not trying to fight against bullies. This passiveness is explained for several reasons. They can be his fear of becoming another victim, his lack of knowledge of how to behave in this situation, or his fear of making the situation worse. He feels Jerry's suffering and suggests he continue selling chocolates. He sees the cruelty around; however, he does not have enough courage to demonstrate his resentment. Throughout the novel, the reader may see how deeply affected he is by the events happening to his close friend, Jerry. To support Jerry, Goubert stops selling chocolate when he reaches 27 boxes; however, he is shocked and, at the same time, frustrated when he is announced as one who completed sales successfully. Applause and whistles as a sign of appreciation made him feel guilty, a traitor, and "rotten". He could not be courageous enough to tell that he follows Jerry in his non-conformism. The falsification of selling disgusts him by the school and the whole system. He prefers not to inform Jerry's father about his sufferings.

As a victim of the Vigils, Jerry is traumatised physically and psychologically. His rebellious, brave, stoic spirit makes him a victim of the Vigils and Brother Leon. Brother Leon is shocked by his rejection to sell chocolates, as no one dares to disobey him. He approaches Archie and the Vigils to intervene in this situation, as Jerry can be a role model in his rebellion for other students. Leon notices that students express their views about the irrationality of business. This all results in Jerry becoming a target for the Vigils. They continuously victimise him; they threaten him, make phone calls at night with mysterious giggles on the telephone, steal his homework from the teacher's desk, and eventually, he is atrociously beaten by Janza.

The impact of school administration on the emotional well-being of the pupil reflected in the novel

School teachers' and administrators' roles are critical in a child's development as a full-fledged personality. In the novel by Robert Cormier, the authority is Brother Leon, who keeps the children in fear during the lesson, and poisons those who are weaker and those who dare to contradict him. One example would be the situation with *"Bailey: one of the weak kids, high honour student, but shy, introverted, always reading, his eyes redrimmed behind the glasses"* (Cormier, 2004, p. 40). The situation intimidates not only Bailey but also the rest of the children in the class. Bailey is shivering with fear, while the rest of the pupils are in nervous tension. Jerry notices "*a vein throbbing in the boy's temple"* (Cormier, 2004, p. 40) and feels how scared he is. Gesticulating widely, he slaps Bailey on the cheek as if it happened accidentally. Leon's next move is his attack on Bailey to suppress the will and intimidate Bailey, accusing him of cheating and turning his every gesture and word against him. In fear of becoming another target for Leon, the children do not interfere in the 'show' of the headmaster. The author compares the silence in the classroom to "*a blinding white flash that strikes cities dead"* (Cormier, 2004, p. 41) of a hydrogen bomb, which produces the noise after the flash. The children, in anticipation of this noise, are in dead silence. Jerry, the main hero of the novel, watching the scene, feels Bailey's situation, his emotional reaction is activated, and Bailey's pain and feelings become his own: *"his checks getting warm, throbbing with the warmth, …his neck began to hurt, …and his lungs burned."* (Cormier, 2004, p. 42). The following extract from the same chapter illustrates the psychological state of Jerry as a witness to bullying:

"Is silence an admission of guilt, Bailey?" Brother Leon asked, turning to the boy at last.

Bailey shook his head frantically. Jerry feels his own head shaking, joining Bailey in silent denial." (Cormier, 2004, p. 42)

Bailey resembles *"something wounded, lost, abandoned"* with *"eyes wide in disbelief"* (Cormier, 2004, p. 43), and realizing that no one would intercede for him, he hoped for an external factor to stop Leon in his aggression. Brother Leon, on the other hand, a caustic sadist, sees the children's fear and enjoys the *"show"* that he managed to put on; at the end of the chapter accuses the children of cowardice, inciting Bailey against them because they *"cheated"* him, they *"doubted"* him, not Leon (Cormier, 2004, p. 45). The author describes students' nervous tension and their admission that there is neither hope nor help in this situation.

This example illustrates how school administration may reduce students' confidence by using their fear not to contravene, and it illustrates an example of the teacher gaining 'allies' among students. On the one hand, the boys, who witness Bailey's traumatisation, feel relaxed after Leon targets their peer this time as if a predator has found its prey, and the remaining are safe for the time being. While standing in front of the audience with *"wide open eyes in disbelief"* (Cormier, 2004, p. 43) and his mouth like an *"open wound"* (Cormier, 2004, p. 41), Bailey feels guilty, unaware of what he is accused of. Eventually, he blames everyone in the class for turning the class into Nazi Fascism by being silent observers and allowing him to tease Bailey. Since the story happened in front of the audience, the class boys became silent witnesses. Some boys feel sorry for the boy, some feel relief for escaping the fate of Bailey, and for the others, it becomes an entertaining show.

Another example would be the intimidation of David Caroni to obtain information about the reason for

Jerry's refusal to sell chocolate. Having reduced the mark, Leon is trying to blackmail the student, intending to extract any information from him. Being a savvy student, David Caroni understands the teacher's intentions and reveals that Jerry is on an assignment for the Vigils. David Caroni is embarrassed by Leon's behaviour, annoyed at the corrupt teachers who are "*as corrupt as villains"* from books and movies, and the life which is "*rotten"* (Cormier, 2004, p. 109). This dialogue affects David's condition as he feels pain, migraine, and stomach-lurching sickeningly. This dialogue leaves an indelible mark on the memory of a 14-year-old boy, for whom the teachers were ideals but became villains; he gets migraines and sickening stomachaches, which justifies our research on the impact of bullying on the physical and psychological health of the child.

Jerry's victimisation does not stop with the end of the chocolate sale. In one of the last chapters, the reader observes when the selling results are falsified and, surprisingly, the sales rise. The reader may see that money comes from indistinct and doubtful sources since the leader of the Vigils delivers money daily and even assigns to whom those sales will be recorded. The fake sale rates and even the names of the active students would help brother Leon to turn other boys against Jerry. He could also unify with the Vigils in his fight. Being a teacher and a representative of the school authority, Leon allowed this massive attack against one of the students of his school, which led the latter to lose his health and psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

The present research aimed to examine the impact of school bullying on a young person reflected in Robert Cormier's novel The Chocolate War. The second aim of this study was to investigate the effects of a teacher's attitude towards a particular pupil on the development of the latter's mental health.

Unity of school authority with a group of bullies leads to instability at school and students' mistrust towards the school as an educationally purposeful establishment. Students became hesitant about the rationality of the tasks that undermined school authority. According to some students, the school is "rotten" from the inside (Cormier, 2004, p. 151), and they lose any willingness to devote themselves to the school's mission. They hated Trinity.

Schoolmaster Leon's public questioning of Jerry regarding his superiority and his instigating other students against him is much reminiscent of how educators behave when they see rebellious students in their class. Any type of bullying – physical or psychological leads to a child's trauma, and bullying of a teenager has a high probability of bringing the teenager to suicidal behaviour. A teacher's attitude toward a specific student can lead to the victimisation of one by others in the class. Aggressive behaviour can be contagious, involving followers in violent actions against victims. In the example of the book, Jerry, who was perceived as a victim and even clued other students in on the irrationality of chocolate selling, later became a target for everyone's resentment.

Also, it is apparent from the examples provided above that involvement in bullying as a bystander may boost a student's aggressiveness and reduce the self-esteem of a student in case a student does not intervene, just due to fear of becoming another victim. The novel's last chapters illustrate how a victim turns into a bully, easily manipulated by another bully eager to fight against Janza.

The analysis of the novel's characters found that generally, there is a high association between being bullied and depression, while witnessing aggression may lead to a feeling of guilt and depression. The novel's bullies never felt guilty or pity for their victims, so it can be suggested to analyse bully characters in more depth in other literary works to see and compare their character's deviations, their families' backgrounds, and social statuses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to thank my supervisor, Prof. Anatoliy Stepanovich Lihodzievskiy, for his constant advice in researching young people's problems, and who has been continuously monitoring my progress and motivating me throughout the investigation. A very special thank you goes out to my friend and colleague, Aicha Hocine, a professor of literary studies at Ammar Telidji University, who agreed to review the article and share her precious experience.

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