

**Media portrayals of bullying and cyberbullying using
Mean Girls and *The DUFF* to analyze how the media
portrays high school bullying**

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Topic

- Analyzing the portrayal of cyberbullying and bullying in the media through the motion pictures, *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004) and *The DUFF* (Sandel, 2015).

KEY TERMS:

- **Traditional Bullying**: bullying as an aggressive act or behavior that is inflicted systematically and repetitively onto an individual who is unable to defend themselves, by a group or individual (Smith et. al, 2008).
- **Cyberbullying**: an aggressive act or behavior that is inflicted systematically and repetitively onto an individual who is unable to defend themselves but includes the use of technology such as text messaging, social media, and instant messaging as the form of harassment (Smith et. al, 2008).

Theory

- **Cyberbullying and bullying portrayed in media is a portrayal of violence-**(Movie and media are meant to “drive our sensations, thoughts, and feelings.”)(*Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies*, Arthur P. Shimamura p. 1, 2013).
- **Social Cognitive Theory-Watching the media portrayals and forming an experience from it**
 - Not just the observation of events but exploration of the events, manipulation of it-produce an experience from the social and physical environments they are exposed to (Bandura, 2001, p. 4).
- **Medium Theory-Portrayal of actions and devices as the message**
 - Focuses not on what the message says but the action or medium itself
 - “The medium is the message.” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 7) .



Theory

- **Framing Theory-Frames of reference used in the media**
 - Requires use of “information processing and interpretation” acquired from previous situations (Schufele, 1999, p. 105)
 - Frames of reference to help interpret the scene (Schufele, 1999, p. 105)
 - Interpretations of the media are “influenced by preexisting meaning structures or schemas” (Schufele, 1999, p. 105)
- **Semiotics Theory-Signs and meaning interpreted from media portrayal**
 - Creating and interpreting one’s own meaning of different signs
 - Meaning is established through the output of actions and objects that serve a purpose to “signs” that connect to other signs (Kelly, 2005, p. 227).



Research Questions/Hypothesis

Research Questions and Hypothesis

- (R1): Within the time span of the two movies, does cyberbullying become more common?
- (R2): How are the bullying scenes framed?

(H): Over the time span from when the first movie came out to the second movie, there will most likely be an increase in the use of technology and accounts of cyberbullying.



Methods-Coding and Data Collection

- **Bullying interpretation and quantitative collection done through the use of the definitions of cyberbullying and bullying**
 - to interpret and differentiate between types of bullying in scenes as well as count technology scenes
- **Three point scale used to determine the framing of scenes.**
 - Comedic (1), Serious (2), Sympathetic or fake display (3).
- **Character framing scale**
 - Popular student (p), normal student (n), unattractive/undesirable (u), and mean/vindictive (m).



Results- *The DUFF*

- Total Bullying scenes in *The DUFF*: 37.
- Cyberbullying scenes in *The DUFF*: 14 Traditional bullying scenes: 23
- 14 instances of cyberbullying = “very frequent”
- 23 instances of traditional bullying= “very frequent”
- 20 overall scenes of technology used-6 for non-bullying purposes

Main character is presented in three different frames throughout the film: normal, unattractive, mean

- Framing of bullying scenes
 - Comedic: 16
 - Serious: 13
 - Sympathy/Fake display: 6
 - Combination of comedic and serious: 2



Results- *Mean Girls*

- Total Bullying scenes in *Mean Girls*: 11.
- Cyberbullying scenes in *Mean Girls*: 1 Traditional bullying scenes: 10
- 1 instances of cyberbullying = “not very frequent”
- 10 instances of traditional bullying= “frequent”
- 9 overall scenes of technology used- 8 for non-bullying purposes

Main character is presented in three different frames throughout the film: normal, unattractive, mean

- Framing of scenes
 - Comedic: 2
 - Serious: 6
 - Combination of serious and sympathy/fake display: 1
 - Combination of comedic and serious: 2



Discussion

- Review of Hypothesis for Discussion reference
 - (H): Over the time span from when the first movie came out to the second movie, there will most likely be an increase in the use of technology and accounts of cyberbullying.
 - h1) The use of cell phones for videos, messages, and spreading rumors will be the main components of cyberbullying.
 - h2) The use of computers, cellphones, and social media as tools of cyberbullying will most likely occur more in the second movie than the first movie.
- First, the main hypothesis is supported by the results in *The DUFF*, meaning there was an increase in the use of technology in the second movie and accounts of cyberbullying.
- The first sub-hypothesis is supported by *The DUFF* results, but not by the results of *Mean Girls*.
- Second sub-hypothesis is supported by the researcher's results

Discussion

- Cyberbullying and self-esteem have a connection
- Comedic frame is used very commonly to portray cyberbullying, especially in *The DUFF*
 - Possibility that someone may try to imitate the cyberbullying technique thinking that it will be funny and not harmful.
 - Media presentation of bullying scenes through a comedic lens, negates the serious nature of the threat
- Serious frame used commonly in both films
 - Bully portrayed as immune, causing intentional harm, real environment presented
 - Similar for the sympathetic frame
- Technology is used in the film as part of the medium
 - Marshall McLuhan's "The medium is the message."
 - Media portrays technology as a major part of the problem in the cyberbullying epidemic

Conclusion and Limitations

- There is an increase in Cyberbullying and Traditional bullying (Specifically focusing on *The DUFF*.)
 - Future hypothesis for research going forward: Cyberbullying has become more common in movies as technology becomes more prominent in movies.
- Study more genres to see if the increase in cyberbullying happens outside of high school comedy genre.
- Limitations
 - Only two movies were analyzed, and the most recent was in 2015
 - Both bullies in the movies were females- different genders of bullies likely produces a difference in portrayal (good thought for research going forward. . .)
 - Class research assignment-limited by time in the semester and by other classes
- What would the researchers have done differently?

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