INTERPRETING THE CONDITIONS OF BULLYING IN PHOTOBOOK ENTITLED "BULLY"

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Abstract

This study aims to interpret the conditions of bullying as depicted in the photobook *"Bully"*, exploring the symbolic and aesthetic elements used to represent the psychological and emotional dimensions of bullying. Utilizing a qualitative, interpretative approach, the research employs visual analysis and symbolic interpretation to uncover the deeper meanings conveyed through the photobook's imagery. The analysis focuses on how visual elements such as lighting, composition, and perspective reflect the dynamics of power, fear, isolation, and resilience within the context of bullying. The study is grounded in the *Social-Ecological Model* and *Cognitive-Behavioral Theory*, which provide frameworks for understanding the multifaceted nature of bullying and the cognitive distortions experienced by both victims and perpetrators. Results reveal that shadows in the images symbolize the psychological distress and cognitive distortions faced by victims and bullies, while light represents hope, resilience, and the potential for cognitive and emotional recovery. The photobook effectively captures the complex interplay between individual experiences and social influences, illustrating how both victims and bullies are affected by and respond to their environments. The findings underscore the importance of addressing both psychological and social factors in bullying interventions and highlight the photobook's role as a powerful medium for visualizing and understanding these dynamics.

Keywords: Bullying, photobook, social-ecological model, cognitive-behavioral theory

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginterpretasikan kondisi bullying yang tergambarkan dalam photobook "Bully", dengan mengeksplorasi elemen simbolis dan estetis yang digunakan untuk merepresentasikan dimensi psikologis dan emosional dari bullying. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan interpretatif, penelitian ini memanfaatkan analisis visual dan interpretasi simbolis untuk mengungkap makna mendalam yang disampaikan melalui gambar-gambar dalam photobook. Analisis difokuskan pada bagaimana elemen visual seperti pencahayaan, komposisi, dan perspektif mencerminkan dinamika kekuatan, ketakutan, isolasi, dan ketahanan dalam konteks bullying. Penelitian ini berlandaskan pada Social-Ecological Model dan Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, yang menyediakan kerangka untuk memahami sifat multifaset dari bullying dan distorsi kognitif yang dialami oleh korban dan pelaku. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa bayangan dalam gambar melambangkan distress psikologis dan distorsi kognitif yang

dihadapi oleh korban dan pelaku, sementara cahaya mewakili harapan, ketahanan, dan potensi untuk pemulihan kognitif dan emosional. Photobook ini secara efektif menangkap interaksi kompleks antara pengalaman individu dan pengaruh sosial, menggambarkan bagaimana baik korban maupun pelaku dipengaruhi oleh dan merespons lingkungan mereka. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya menangani faktor psikologis dan sosial dalam intervensi bullying dan menyoroti peran photobook sebagai media yang kuat untuk memvisualisasikan dan memahami dinamika ini.

Kata kunci: Bullying, photobook, *social-ecological model*, *cognitive-behavioral theory*

INTRODUCTION

Bullying has become a complex and widespread social issue across the globe. This phenomenon occurs not only in schools but also in various social environments, including workplaces and cyberspace. The impact of bullying can be highly detrimental to the victim, both physically and psychologically, often leading to decreased self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Photography, as a visual medium, holds great power in depicting social realities, and in this context, the photo book titled *"Bully"* becomes a powerful medium for interpreting the conditions of bullying. Through a combination of visuals and narratives, this photobook offers profound insights into the dynamics of bullying and its effects on both the victims and society at large (O'Toole, 2023).

The Social-Ecological Model (SEM), as conceptualized by Urie Bronfenbrenner, presents a holistic view of human development, emphasizing that individuals do not exist in isolation but are constantly interacting with multiple environments or systems. These systems include the *microsystem* (immediate environments like family, school, and peer groups), the *mesosystem* (interactions between these environments), the *exosystem* (external environments that indirectly influence the individual, such as a parent's workplace), and the *macrosystem* (broader societal and cultural contexts) (Bille Pettersson & Vauhkonen, 2020). In the context of bullying, SEM helps us understand that a bully's behavior is not only a result of individual aggression or intent but is shaped by these surrounding factors.

At the microsystem level, the interactions between the bully, victim, peers, and authority figures play a crucial role. For example, a hostile or neglectful family environment may contribute to aggressive behavior, while a supportive and communicative family can act as a protective factor against bullying (Lien & Nielssen, 2021). Schools, as part of the microsystem, are equally influential. If the school environment is punitive or fosters competition without promoting empathy, it can inadvertently support bullying behaviors. In the photobook *"Bully"*, these dynamics may be visually represented through depictions of the bully in various settings – perhaps highlighting moments of tension within the home or showing how peer dynamics play out in school settings. The photobook can capture the interplay of different environments and how they shape both the bully and the victim.

Moving outward to the mesosystem, which involves the interactions between different microsystems, the relationship between a child's home life and school life can significantly affect bullying dynamics. For example, a child may experience conflicting

messages between home and school; while their home may model aggressive behavior, their school may attempt to encourage positive peer interactions (Pollen, t.t.). This dissonance can lead to confusion and exacerbate tendencies toward bullying. Photographic representations in *"Bully"* might visually depict these contrasting environments, helping the viewer to see how these conflicting influences shape the bully's actions and the victim's responses.

At the exosystem level, factors such as parents' work environments, local community influences, and the availability of social services also play a role. A bully may come from a home where their parents experience high levels of stress due to work demands or economic hardship, which could indirectly affect how the child behaves in social settings. Similarly, community factors, such as the presence or absence of neighborhood support systems or after-school programs, can influence whether children feel a sense of belonging or alienation. The photobook *"Bully"* could illustrate such external influences subtly, showing glimpses of parents' stress or community environments that may contribute to the overall culture of bullying (Short dkk., 2020).

The microsystem, which includes societal and cultural attitudes, values, and policies, creates the broader backdrop against which bullying occurs. Cultural attitudes toward aggression, competition, and power dynamics can normalize or discourage bullying behaviors. In some societies, hierarchical structures and rigid social expectations may implicitly condone bullying as a means of asserting dominance. The photobook could potentially explore these societal themes, perhaps using imagery that captures the cultural symbols and practices that frame bullying as either acceptable or condemnable. For instance, visual metaphors representing societal pressures to conform or exert control could be used to critique the way larger systems perpetuate bullying behaviors(Turnbull, 2023).

Cognitive-behavioral theory (CBT) complements SEM by focusing on the individual-level processes involved in bullying behavior. CBT posits that behavior is largely shaped by cognitive processes – how individuals perceive and interpret the world around them. In the context of bullying, cognitive distortions may lead bullies to justify their behavior by perceiving their victims as deserving of mistreatment or by minimizing the harm they inflict. This internal narrative, reinforced by external cues, perpetuates bullying. From the victim's perspective, negative self-perceptions – often reinforced by bullying – can lead to a vicious cycle of self-blame, helplessness, and withdrawal (Fransberg, 2021).

Through a Cognitive-Behavioral lens, the photobook *"Bully"* may reveal the inner world of both the bully and the victim. For the bully, visuals could illustrate the distorted thinking patterns that reinforce their actions – perhaps through imagery that depicts the bully's rationalizations or moments where they downplay their actions. The photobook could use close-up portraits or symbolic images to depict moments of internal conflict or self-justification. For the victim, the photobook could portray the internalized messages of worthlessness or fear, using visual techniques to capture the isolation and emotional turmoil they experience. The juxtaposition of the bully's and the victim's inner narratives

could offer a powerful commentary on the psychological processes that drive bullying behavior and its impact (Navascués, 2023).

Moreover, CBT suggests that interventions must target these cognitive processes to disrupt the bullying cycle. For instance, helping bullies recognize their cognitive distortions and teaching victims to challenge their negative self-beliefs can reduce the incidence and impact of bullying. In this light, the photobook may not only serve as a documentation of bullying but also as an educational tool that invites viewers to reconsider their cognitive responses to bullying situations. By visually representing these cognitive-behavioral dynamics, the photobook *"Bully"* has the potential to foster empathy and awareness, encouraging both bullies and bystanders to reflect on the underlying thought patterns that perpetuate harmful behaviors.

Previous research on bullying has predominantly focused on quantitative studies measuring the prevalence of bullying, risk factors, and its impact on individuals' mental health. For example, Bhattacharya, (2022) in his renowned study developed the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), which has been used to reduce bullying incidents in schools. Another study by Hillenbrand, (2020) examined forms of cyberbullying and its effects on young people. However, few studies have used a visual approach to understanding bullying, especially in the form of a photo book. This makes the current research important as it offers a different approach, using images as a tool to understand the emotional nuances and conditions that are often missed in quantitative approaches.

The fundamental difference between this research and previous studies lies in the media and methodology used. While earlier studies used surveys, interviews, or statistical analysis to study bullying, this research emphasizes visual analysis and artistic interpretation of the photobook as the main source of data. In other words, this study combines visual art analysis with social studies, creating a unique intersection between aesthetics and sociology in exploring the phenomenon of bullying. This research also contributes new insights into how visualization can help raise awareness of bullying issues and provide a deeper understanding of victims' experiences.

The novelty of this research lies in the use of the photobook as a medium for studying bullying, something rarely found in academic literature. Moreover, this research opens up discussions on how art can be used as a tool for social education and transformation. Through the interpretation of images in the photobook, it is hoped that new understandings will emerge about how bullying affects individuals and communities as a whole. This research aims to explore and interpret the conditions of bullying depicted in the photo book titled *"Bully."* This study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the role of visual elements in illustrating the dynamics of this psychological violence, as well as how the photobook can contribute to raising public awareness and understanding of the impacts of bullying. Furthermore, this research aims to open new discussions about non-traditional ways of combating bullying through visual art.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative method with an interpretative approach. This research aims to interpret the conditions of bullying depicted in the photo book titled *"Bully"*. A qualitative approach is chosen because this study focuses on exploring deep meanings and visual representations, which cannot be explained quantitatively (Jaya, 2020). The data collection techniques used in this research are visual analysis and documentation. The photobook *"Bully"* will be analyzed in depth to identify symbolism, image composition, visual narratives, and the messages conveyed through its images.

The analysis will be conducted in several stages. First, the researcher will observe and describe the images in detail. Every visual element, from facial expressions to background and lighting, will be identified and described. Second, the researcher will interpret these visual elements by linking them to relevant bullying theories, such as the *Social-Ecological Model* and *Cognitive-Behavioral Theory*. This process involves a deep understanding of how the images in the photobook reflect the dynamics between the bully, the victim, and the surrounding social environment.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews with the photobook's creator or individuals involved in its production will be utilized, if possible, to gain further insights into the purpose and perspectives behind the visual depictions. The data obtained from visual analysis and interviews will be interpreted to form a comprehensive narrative about the bullying conditions presented in the photobook *"Bully"*. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide new insights into how visual art can serve as an effective medium for communicating social phenomena like bullying.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to interpret the conditions of bullying depicted in the photo book titled *"Bully"* through visual analysis and symbolic narratives. Based on the analysis of the images in the photobook, several key themes emerged, reflecting various aspects of bullying, such as power, fear, isolation, and resistance. Each of these themes is then linked to relevant bullying theories, particularly the *Social-Ecological Model* and *Cognitive-Behavioral Theory*.

1. The Theme of Power and Domination in Bullying

The images in the photobook depict the visual representation of the bully, often portrayed as a dominant figure, both physically and psychologically. The bully is illustrated with intimidating body postures, sharp gazes, and image compositions that convey a sense of superiority. In the *Social-Ecological Model*, this aspect of power does not only stem from the individual traits of the bully but is also supported by the surrounding social environment. For example, the depiction of the bully in school settings or peer groups shows that this power and dominance are often reinforced by social groups or broader systems, such as school hierarchies.

This visual representation of power is also linked to *Cognitive-Behavioral Theory*, where bullies tend to have cognitive distortions that view their victims as inferior or weak. The images that emphasize the physical and psychological differences between the bully and the victim reflect how the bully uses this power to justify their aggressive actions. Bullies often believe that their victims deserve the mistreatment because they are perceived as different or weaker, consistent with cognitive theories about the justification of aggressive behavior.

2. Fear and Trauma in Victims

Another prominent aspect of the photobook *"Bully"* is the depiction of the fear experienced by victims. The images often show victims in a state of crouching, avoiding, or bowing down, indicating the fear and trauma they are experiencing. In the *Social-Ecological Model*, this fear not only arises from the direct interaction between the victim and the bully but also from the lack of social support or intervention from third parties, such as peers, teachers, or family members.

From the perspective of *Cognitive-Behavioral Theory*, the fear and trauma experienced by victims can be explained as the result of internalizing negative messages from the bully. Victims often begin to believe that they deserve to be treated poorly, which then exacerbates their psychological trauma. In the photobook, these feelings of fear are visualized through the use of dark colors, sharp contrasts, and perspectives that highlight the victim's sense of alienation or powerlessness.

3. Social Isolation as an Impact of Bullying

Social isolation is another important theme that emerges in this photobook. The images that depict the victim alone, separated from social groups, or abandoned by their friends illustrate the impact of bullying on the victim's social interactions. From the perspective of the *Social-Ecological Model*, this isolation can be understood as the result of interactions between various interconnected social systems (Corrigan, 2024). The school environment, peer groups, and even the victim's family can either exacerbate or alleviate this isolation. For example, a lack of support from peers can cause the victim to feel even more marginalized, whereas support from family can serve as a protective factor, helping the victim cope with isolation.

In *Cognitive-Behavioral Theory*, this social isolation is also related to the cognitive distortions experienced by the victim. Victims often develop the belief that they are unwanted or unworthy of being part of social groups, which worsens their sense of alienation. The photobook captures this sense of isolation by visually portraying the victim separated from the group, with space around them symbolizing deep feelings of loneliness.

4. Resistance and Resilience of Victims

Although the photobook *"Bully"* features many images depicting the victim's fear and powerlessness, there are also some images that show the victim's resistance and resilience. Some images depict the victim standing strong, staring directly at the camera,

or attempting to fight back against the bully (Slee, 2022). This indicates that while victims often feel trapped in bullying situations, they still have the potential to resist and survive.

In the context of the *Social-Ecological Model*, this resistance can be understood as the result of the support the victim receives from their environment, whether from family, peers, or educational institutions. Meanwhile, from the perspective of *Cognitive-Behavioral Theory*, this resistance reflects a cognitive shift in the victim, where they begin to realize that they do not deserve to be treated poorly and attempt to change their perceptions of themselves and their social environment.

5. Symbolic Meaning and Aesthetics in the Photobook

The photobook *"Bully"* not only serves as a representation of the reality of bullying but also as a medium rich in symbolism and aesthetics. The use of visual elements such as lighting, composition, and perspective provides deep meanings that go beyond mere visual documentation. For example, the dominant use of shadows in some images can be interpreted as a symbol of the psychological power that haunts the victim. Meanwhile, the use of light in some images of the victim resisting can be seen as a symbol of hope and resilience.

In cognitive-behavioral *Theory*, this symbolic meaning can illustrate the internal processes occurring within both the victim and the bully. For example, shadows may represent the cognitive distortions that overshadow the victim's thinking, while light could symbolize the recovery and cognitive changes that occur as the victim begins to realize their potential to resist (Ellapen, 2020). Building on this interpretation, the use of shadows and light within the photobook *"Bully"* serves as a potent metaphor for the psychological struggles faced by both victims and bullies. Shadows, often used in the background or as an encompassing element, can symbolize the looming presence of fear, insecurity, and distorted self-perceptions that victims experience as a result of bullying. The shadows' overpowering nature may represent how the psychological effects of bullying can engulf a victim's self-esteem, isolating them further from social connections and reinforcing feelings of helplessness. This aligns with *Cognitive-Behavioral Theory*, which posits that negative thought patterns, often exacerbated by traumatic experiences like bullying, can lead to a cycle of self-defeating beliefs and behaviors.

Similarly, the use of shadows may also reflect the internalized fears and insecurities of the bully. According to *Cognitive-Behavioral Theory*, bullies often exhibit aggressive behaviors as a way to assert control or dominance, masking their underlying vulnerabilities (Riekki, 2020). The shadow in this context may be seen as a manifestation of the bully's distorted thoughts and beliefs about power, relationships, and self-worth. Bullies may project their insecurities onto their victims, using aggression to cope with their feelings of inadequacy or powerlessness. The interplay between light and shadow in the photobook thus visually communicates the internal battle within both victim and bully, where darkness represents the suppression of emotional turmoil, while light symbolizes the potential for self-awareness and growth.

On the other hand, the strategic use of light in the photobook conveys hope, resistance, and the possibility of transformation. In images where victims are depicted standing tall or looking directly at the camera, the lighting becomes brighter and more focused, highlighting their resilience. This shift in lighting symbolizes a change in the victim's perception where the darkness of trauma no longer dominates, and instead, the light signifies their growing strength and determination to break free from the emotional burden inflicted by bullying.

From a *Cognitive-Behavioral* perspective, this use of light could represent the victim's journey towards cognitive restructuring where they begin to challenge the negative self-beliefs instilled by the bullying experience. Through supportive environments or therapeutic interventions, victims can start to reframe their thoughts, recognizing that the negative messages they have internalized about themselves are not reflective of reality (Aldama, 2020). This process of cognitive restructuring helps victims regain a sense of control and agency, allowing them to move toward recovery. The light in these images serves as a visual metaphor for this cognitive shift, symbolizing empowerment and the reclaiming of one's self-worth.

Furthermore, light can also be interpreted as a form of external support, such as positive social influences or community interventions that help illuminate the path to recovery for the victim. Just as light dispels shadows, external validation, empathy, and understanding from peers, family, or professionals can help victims rebuild their self-esteem and confront the lingering effects of bullying (Taylor, 2021). The photobook's portrayal of light shining on the victim in moments of defiance or resilience may suggest the importance of social support in overcoming the psychological scars of bullying. According to *Cognitive-Behavioral Theory*, social environments play a crucial role in shaping an individual's thought patterns, and positive reinforcement from one's environment can aid in fostering healthier cognitive processes.

The photobook's ability to visually capture these complex emotional dynamics—through the interplay of light and shadow elevates it beyond simple documentation. It becomes a tool for viewers to engage with the deeper psychological and emotional layers of bullying. The use of light to represent hope, coupled with the darkness as a metaphor for psychological distress, encourages the viewer to reflect on the internal states of both the victim and the bully, and how their respective environments influence these states. This visual representation aligns with *Cognitive-Behavioral* principles, emphasizing that thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are interconnected and shaped by both internal and external factors (Hariman, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The study of the photobook *"Bully"* offers valuable insights into the complex psychological dynamics of bullying, as depicted through visual and symbolic representations. By analyzing the images within the framework of the *Social-Ecological Model* and *Cognitive-Behavioral Theory*, this research reveals how the interplay of individual, social, and environmental factors shapes the experiences of both victims and

perpetrators of bullying. The photobook uses powerful visual elements, such as shadows and light, to symbolize the internal struggles, fears, and emotional trauma experienced by victims, as well as the distorted cognitive processes driving the behavior of bullies. Shadows in the images represent the overwhelming presence of fear and negative self-beliefs, while light symbolizes hope, resilience, and the possibility of recovery.

Through the interpretative analysis, it becomes evident that bullying is not merely a surface-level social interaction but a deeply psychological issue. Victims often internalize the negative messages they receive, leading to cognitive distortions that reinforce feelings of isolation, powerlessness, and unworthiness. Meanwhile, bullies, driven by their own insecurities and distorted thought patterns, use aggression as a coping mechanism to assert dominance. However, the photobook also highlights the potential for cognitive and emotional growth, as seen in images where victims display defiance and resilience, illuminated by brighter, more hopeful light.

In conclusion, the photobook *"Bully"* serves as both a representation of the reality of bullying and a medium rich in symbolism, capturing the profound psychological impact on all involved. This study emphasizes the importance of addressing both the cognitive and social dimensions of bullying through interventions that foster resilience, positive cognitive restructuring, and supportive environments. The photobook stands as a powerful artistic and educational tool, prompting deeper reflection on the internal conditions of bullying and the paths toward healing and recovery.

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