Reflections of Bullying on Children's Personality in R. J. Palacio's "Wonder" Novel: Psychologically and Socially

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Abstract

This study investigates the theme of bullying and its influence on Children's personality development as used in R.J. Palacio's bestselling novel "Wonder". Palacio is a well-known novelist with a keen interest in children's literature, especially those addressing congenital deformities and their psychological and social issues. This research utilises a social and psychological reading of the "Wonder" novel, discusses Palacio's attempts to portray the suffering of individuals with congenital deformities due to bullying, and challenges the societal view of performance self-realization through the concept of Olweus. The "Wonder" novel is a mirror for these children, reflecting the psychological crises they go through in society and at the same time presenting a picture of how to deal with them in a systematic way, enabling them to become influential members of society. The purpose of this study is to motivate tolerance of oneself and others. Additionally, it argues bullying through the lens of Olweus and the various forms of discrimination that the protagonist

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experiences. Additionally, it employs qualitative methods of analysis to focus on Palacio's recommendations for dealing with bullying and learning to accept oneself in society. As a result, it summarizes the key points made throughout the article and examines how this social and psychological critique of those with special needs has affected and constrained how we read the novel "Wonder."

Keywords: self-realization, Bullying, reflection, Children's personality, and wonder

إنعكاسات التنمر على شحصية الاطفال في الرواية "العجيبة" لبالاسيو نفسيا" و إجتماعيا"

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الـمستخلـص

تتناول هذه الدراسة موضوع التنمر وتأثيره على تنمية شخصية الأطفال كما هو مستخدم في دراسة ر.ج. رواية بالاسيو الأكثر مبيعا "عجب". وبالاسيو روائي معروف وله اهتمام كبير بأدب الأطفال، خاصة تلك التي تتناول التشوهات الخلقية وقضاياها النفسية والاجتماعية. يستخدم هذا البحث قراءة اجتماعية ونفسية لرواية "العجائب"، ويناقش محاولات بالاسيو لتصوير معاناة الأفراد المصابين بتشوهات خلقية بسبب التنمر، ويتحدى النظرة المجتمعية لتحقيق الذات في الأداء من خلال مفهوم أولويوس. وتعتبر رواية "العجيبة" مرآة لهؤلاء الأطفال، حيث تعكس الأزمات النفسية التي يمرون بها في المجتمع، وتقدم في الوقت نفسه صورة عن كيفية التعامل معهم بطريقة منهجية تمكنهم من أن يصبحوا أعضاء مؤثرين في المجتمع. الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو تحفيز التسامح مع الذات والآخرين. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فهو يناقش التنمر من خلال عدسة Olweus والأشكال المختلفة للتمييز الذي يعاني منه بطل الرواية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإنه يستخدم أساليب التحليل النوعية للتركيز على توصيات بالاسيو للتعامل مع التنمر وتعلم قبول الذات في المجتمع. ونتيجة لذلك، فإنه يلخص النقاط الرئيسية التي تم تناولها في جميع أنحاء المقال ويفحص كيف أثر هذا النقد الاجتماعي والنفسي لذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة وقيد كيفية قراءتنا لرواية "العجب".

Introduction

Bullying is spreading rapidly these days, as if it is something normal and harmless psychologically, physically, and even socially, and its risk may reach the point of suicide

in order to get rid of this social discrimination. In RJ Palacio's novel, the writer explained the amount of suffering and challenges faced by victims, especially those with deformities.

This phenomenon is always a present issue in society these days. For many years, physical appearance was the main and most important thing to contacting others. As an example, anyone with good looks has positive responses in society, showing respect and praise, making friends, and contact into society. As for the individuals with a less lucky appearance, the reactions are negative, and they often face difficulty making friends and integrating. They even receive forms of direct and indirect discrimination, as happened with the main character in the novel, especially in school. According to Rahmayanti (2017, p. 10), "People who have a good physical appearance can easily gain positive responses from others".

Self-acceptance is a very important concept, and it is formed through a person's acceptance of his qualities, defects, and capabilities. With this concept, a person can develop himself and integrate into society, regardless of the surrounding circumstances. These individuals struggle to fit in and integrate into society, endure various sorts of bullying every day, and must also learn how to get along with those who are physically different so they can participate fully in society. The situation will be worse if the new student is physically different because they may face a lot of unwanted remarks and struggle to fit in at school. The parents might make an effort to keep him safe. This is a catastrophic error because it isolates him from society, keeps him hidden, and shields him from bullying and discrimination. (Singh and Khan, 2013)

Wonder, a novel by Raquel Jaramillo Palacio It was a best-seller in New York when it was published in 2012. It was adapted for film in 2017 and was the first series of her children's literature. "Wonder" is considered the literature of childhood. It gives context for understanding social norms and conduct, teaches kids how to fit in, and promotes the growth of useful socio-emotional abilities. Children's literature thus plays a crucial role in instilling moral values in young readers. Additionally, it can help kids improve their social skills and give them insight into how they fit into society. (Sya'diyah, 2019, p. 12)

This novel deals with a ten-year-old boy who suffers from a medical syndrome called Treacher-Collins syndrome. It is a rare genetic disease that affects the bones of the face, jaw, and ear and causes deformities in them. "Longitudinal bullying research has indicated a bidirectional relationship between bullying and mental health problems" (Cappadocia, Weiss, and Pepler, 2012, pp. 266-277).

"I think the only person in the world who realizes how ordinary I am is me." (Palacio,10)

This main character suffers from his illness a lot because people see him as an ugly, frightening, and abnormal kid; no one sees him as normal except himself. Even his family feels that he needs protection from bullying and social exclusion. For that, he studies at home, but he will face society for the first time when he enters school in the fifth grade because of the insistence of his parents. He wants nothing more than to be treated as an ordinary kid, but because of his appearance, he receives a lot of verbal and moral bullying from the students, especially Julian, who calls him a zombie, a monster, and other nicknames. At school, the support of family and friends helps him accept himself and increase his confidence. (Cappadocia, Weiss, and Pepler, 2012)

Palacio was born on July 13, 1963, in New York City. Her parents were Colombian immigrants. Her birth name is Raquel Jaramillo (Palacio was her mother's maiden name). Palacio attended the High School of Art and Design in Manhattan and then majored in illustration at the Parsons School of Design. Her early works appeared in The Village Voice and The New York Times Book Review, which eventually segued into her storied career as the art director of several major book publishing companies. She designed thousands of books covers for countless writers in every genre of fiction and nonfiction. Then, she continued her career as a photo illustrator for young people, and her interest in children's literature led her to become an editorial designer. She worked as director of children's books at Workman in 2006, and the next year, she decided to write her first novel. She loves books and children's literature. (Aptekar, 1991, 326-349)

The concept of bullying in literary work

Bullying is a phenomenon that can be defined as "extreme behavior that is abusive" (Musanto, 3), or as repeated aggressive behaviour, carried out by a group or an individual

with the intent to inflict injury or disrespect and is characterized by intentionality, repetitiveness, and power imbalance. (Borgen, 2021). Even this behaviour can be defined more simply as negative, aggressive, and manipulative actions that exist when there is a difference in strength, whatever the source of this strength or the source of its weakness, if it appears as a special situation condition or even as a feeling of difference (Musanto, 1).

Negative acts that are simultaneous and not repeated are excluded from the definition of bullying, and this is according to the definition of bullying given by Dan Olweus:

> 'I define bullying or victimization in the following general way: A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students' (Olweus,9)

With this, Olweus' definition, which covers four criteria for bullying situations, is most applicable. First, there must be violent behavior with the intent to injure physically, psychologically, or both someone. Second, these behaviors must be designed to cause injury to the other person. Third, the balance of power on both sides must be different. Fourth, these harassment activities must be repeated and sustained over time. As a result, the victim's suffering will be exacerbated.

According to Lui and Nicola (2011, pp. 556-568) predicted, A study of the literature on childhood bullying led to the development of four main frameworks for comprehending bullying and its causes. These four provide an overview of the literary landscape. Other classifications are possible; for instance, Mishna (2012) lists six frameworks: social learning, resilience, cognitive behavioral, lifestyles exposure, attribution, and ecological, systems.

Bullying Forms

According to Cappadocia, Weiss, and Pepler (2012, pp. 266-277) stated that, "This education focuses on the different types of bullying (physical, verbal, social, cyber), power imbalances inherent in bullying, student (and human) rights for feeling safe". Bullying victims are subjected to discrimination. It is the practice of rejecting, differentiating, or limiting treatment directed at a person or group based on distinguishing characteristics such as race, skin color, physical body shape, gender, ethnicity, religion, or social class to reduce

or eliminate that person's or group's access to resources. Discrimination is often classified into two types: direct discrimination and indirect discrimination (Mishra, Bansal, and Gangrade, 2021). Bullying and discrimination are synonymous, as there is no bullying without prejudice.

1- Direct Bullying

Negative behavior can be either verbal or physical. When one person threatens, ridicules, tattles, or calls another person a name, When one person punches, pushes, kicks, pinches, or restrains another (direct bullying), It is also possible to engage in negative behavior without using words or physical contact, such as by making dirty expressions or gestures, purposely isolating someone from a group, or refusing to comply with another's demands (Olweus, 1993). August was subjected to numerous forms of prejudice and bullying both inside and outside of school, both direct (verbal or physical) and indirect (moral), and the author depicts the daily conditions that physically different people and bullying victims encounter and suffer from. For examples:

> *"What the deal with your face? I mean were you in a fire or something?"*
> *(palacio, 28)*

This is the expression of his friend Julian, even though he is aware of his disease, but he wanted to humiliate him. The question regarding Auggust's face is asked for the first time in the book, and it's also the rudest and quickest. Here, Palacio presents Julian as an adversary, someone who, no matter how much time he spends with Auggust, won't become a friend. Julian is evidence that not everyone will be kind; it is best for Auggust to cut these people out of his life and concentrate on those who are.

> *-"I think he looks like an orc."*
> *-"Oh yeah!" "If I looked like that," said the Julian voice, kind of laughing, "I*
> *swear to God, I'd put a hood over my face every day." (*Palacio, 60)

August had come to expect such harsh words from others, but what stunned and saddened him were the words of his friend Jack Will. As Hsieh and Wang (2019) said, he is ridiculed and excluded by almost all of his classmates when he first starts school. Additionally, Auggust has always loved Halloween, but he does not enjoy himself at the school celebration. At the school's Halloween party, Auggust overhears his best buddy, Jack Will, and other colleagues, Julian, and Henry, who have always avoided him, laughing at Auggie's face behind his back. Along with his interiority complex

and a sense of betrayal from his best buddy, Auggust struggles with poor self-esteem and frustration.

> *"Rat boy. Freak. Monster. Freddy Krueger. E.T. Gross-out. Lizard face.*
> *Mutant. I know the names they call me. I've been in enough playgrounds*
> *to know kids can be mean. I know, I know, I know."* (Palacio,61).

Due to his physical differences, this youngster was called many cruel and hurtful things. "At home, Auggie is so angry that he punches his pillow, saying "I hate it! I hate it! I hate it!" (p. 82). Auggie's constant movement combined with strong temper reflects characteristics of those with feelings of inferiority. Moreover, Auggie feels betrayed by his friends" (Hsieh and Wang, 2019),

> *"I got notes like: Freak! And another that said: Get out of our school,*
> *orc!"* (Palacio, 146)

They usually find a type of threat that instructs them to leave a given group or a certain place, and August was no exception. He'd always get messages like these in his locker at school.

> *"Oh my God!"*
> *"No way!"*
> *"What is that?"*
> *"What happened to your face?"*
> *"I didn't know we were watching Lord of the Rings tonight!" he said.*
> *"Look, guys, it's Gollum!"*
> *"No man, it's Alien!"*
> *"No, no, no, man. It's an orc!"*
> *"Shining the flashlight in my face again. Then one of the other guys threw*
> *a firecracker at our feet."*
> *"Are you talking to me, Freddie Krueger? I don't think you want to mess with*
> *me, your ugly freak,"*

This dialogue was for one of the seventh-grade students, when they found him in the school camp, and then for the first time he was exposed to physical bullying and direct discrimination as if he were an alien or a non-human that had no feelings, but he found some students from the same class defending him and ran away with them.

2- Indirect Bullying

Bullying behavior is typically covert, subtle, and not necessarily instantly recognized as such. It results in harm, destruction, or humiliation. The target might not become aware of the bullying until after it has already occurred because the words and deeds may be more difficult to distinguish and may be carried out covertly and anonymously. " Being a victim of indirect bullying is the strongest predictor of withdrawn behaviors, somatic complaints, and anxiety/depression, independent of direct victimization (Baldry, 2004, pp. 343-355)". Auggust saw disgusted, terrified, and panicked expressions every day, as if he were not a child but rather an average person who had a sickness that caused his appearance to be unusual. The following quotes illustrate the distressing reality that youngsters must face:

> *"I did notice that no one sat down next to me. A couple of times someone was about to sit next to me, then changed his or her mind at the last minute and sat somewhere else"* (Palacio,34).

No one wants to be his friend on his first day of school; they don't even want to sit next to him. As (Hsieh and Wang, 2019) explain: Even though Auggie is used to having conversations behind his back and having eyes fixed on him, he still finds it disappointing that no one wants to become friends with him and lacks confidence when he first starts school.

> *-"Who's your favorite character?" Julian asked. I started thinking maybe he wasn't so bad."*
> *-"Jango Fett."*
> *-"What about Darth Sidious?" he said. "Do you like him?"(Palacio, 39)*

Darth Sidious is a character in the Star Wars story who was hit by a lightning bolt and burned and melted his face, meaning that he looks like this character. This indirect bullying affected Auggust's life because it made him leave the school. So, he became more isolated, sad, and suffering.

> *"And being at school was awful in the beginning. Every new class I had was like a new chance for kids to "not stare" at me. They would sneak peeks at me from behind their notebooks or when they thought I wasn't looking. They would take the longest way around me to avoid bumping into me in any way, like I had some germ they could catch, like my face was contagious."* (Palacio, 51)

One of the worst forms of bullying is when someone is treated in this way; it makes the target feel like a sickness or infection that everyone should avoid, and when they

unintentionally contact him, they immediately wash their hands afterward since they've nicknamed him the plague (Olweus, 58).

In conclusion, the humiliation and contempt he endured without feeling guilty was sad and a true representation of individuals who suffer from it. These young people carry everyday hardships that are beyond their years and the purity of their hearts.

Impact of Bullying on Childhood

The most vulnerable victims of bullying and societal discrimination are those who are different from the norm, especially those who are physically different, and often those with weak personalities are easy victims of bullying. These victims are lonely and socially marginalized, and being lonely means that they are vulnerable to depression and even committing suicide if they do not find family support or friends to advocate for them. the concept of Olweus (p. 6): -

The victims are frequently depressed, sensitive, cautious, introverted, or low on self-worth. They could struggle to focus, as well as with reading and writing. The victims experience anxiety, insecurity, and depression, which might occasionally cause them to take their own lives. "Children with autism spectrum disorders struggle with initiating and sustaining peer interactions, due to their difficulties with respect to communication and social skills (Cappadocia, Weiss, and Pepler, 266-277)". Typically, they lack friends and spend more time with family and adults.

The effect of bullying on Augustus the protagonist of "Wonder"

This child experiences frequent bullying, which has an adverse psychological and social impact on him. He didn't like himself, and he longed to look different from the way he did. Because of how people react when they see him, he lacks self-confidence and feels insecure.

> "And I feel ordinary. Inside. But I know ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. I know ordinary kids don't get stared at wherever they goIf I found a magic lamp and I could have one wish; I would wish that I had a normal face that no one ever noticed at all" (Palacio,10).

Making friends can aid many people in developing a sense of self-acceptance, but it can also exacerbate the problem, as was the case with August when, after becoming friends with Jack at school, he discovered that even his friend was calling him derogatory names.

> *"Actually," said the mummy, "what he really looks like is one of those shrunken heads. Have you ever seen those? He looks exactly like that." "I think he looks like an orc" (*Palacio,77).

Augustus moved away, cut himself off from society, and studied alone at home until the fifth grade because he did not want to constantly encounter stares of horror and dread from people who treated him as if he were not a fellow human being with feelings.

> *Why do I have to be so ugly, Mommy?" I whispered.*
> *"No, baby, you're not . . ."*
> *"I know I am."(Palcio,50)*

This feeling of incompleteness led to a loss of self-confidence and insecurity. Meanwhile, any person in his situation tries to find a place for himself in society and support his self-confidence and security, especially after he went to school and confronted society directly. He needed to break silence and disappear to integrate into society and have a place in it like any ordinary person. (Salsabilla,1-4). After receiving all kinds of bullying, August has decided to prove himself by facing the bullying and challenging all his fears, and he will achieve this through family and true friends and the moral support that they give him.

The attention, warmth, participation, and moral support of adults like parents and teachers contribute greatly to challenging bullying and overcoming it. If the child finds a positive role model, this will help the child in facing society and bullying. (Olweus, 8-9). These adults are able to recognize bullying and to provide love and encouragement for the victim so that the victim is able to learn how to respond, facing the trauma and its effect (Gottier, 13).

Moral support is an act of care, acceptance of others, and respect for them however they are (Salsabilla, 3-4). This term is very necessary in order to build self-confidence and to feel belonging for society, it is through family and true friends. Treating him without pity or excessive protection will help him discover himself, provide friendships, and make him an active member of society.

It appeared that August, before entering the school, was an isolated person, lacking self-confidence, unhappy, unacceptable to his appearance, and in need of protection because he was always afraid of the reactions of others when they saw him, the problem is not with his appearance as much as with their reactions.

> *"We can't keep protecting him," Mom whispered to Dad, who was driving.*
> *"We can't just pretend he's going to wake up tomorrow and this isn't going*
> *to be his reality, because it is, Nate, and we have to help him learn to deal*
> *with it (Palcio, 14).*

This is his mother's quote when she wanted him to go to school without protection from her in order to learn how to face society and integrate into it. She encouraged him to be strong and confident to be a successful man. So, his family and friends play a great role in his self-confidence.

> *"What did you tell him about me?*
> *How funny you are, and how kind and smart. When I told him you read Dragon*
> *Rider when you were six, he was like, Wow, I have to meet this kid.*
> *Did you tell him anything else?I said.*
> *Mom smiled at me. Her smile kind of hugged me.*
> *I told him about all your surgeries, and how brave you are,she said. So, he knows*
> *what I look like? I asked.*
> *Well, we brought pictures from last summer in Montauk,Dad said. We showed him*
> *pictures of the whole family. And that great shot of you holding that flounder on the*
> *boat!"(Palcio,15).*

By displaying his best traits, using language that accurately describes him, and treating him like a regular person, he was given moral support. A person's social life and communication skills help to shape his or her personality and determine how well-equipped they are to interact with others in society (Rahmayanti, 31). Therefore, a person's personality grows through interacting with society, where they obtain knowledge, power, and position. They also gain security, which is preferable to being both shielded from others and terrified at the same time.

Effects of moral encouragement

August's personality develops as he enrolls in school and interacts with society for the first time because no one is there to shield him. He learnt how to react to people, especially to bullies like Julian who used to verbally abuse him frequently. August pointed out Julian's mistake and stressed that he was not frightened of anything. Then he cut his hair, which was covering his distinctive face because there was no reason to conceal it. This shows that

his confidence is growing each day at school, which is undoubtedly a result of moral support and social activity. Augustus used to cover his head with a helmet so that no one would see him, but his father urged him to throw it away. He eventually threw it away because his father much cherished his face and did not want him to conceal it. (Ali & Ayuningtyas 2019)

He even managed to become friends with Jack and Summer, which not only helped him to accept himself but also helped others see how happy and compassionate he was. He broke off his friendship with his friend after realizing that he was being made fun of while he was away, and they did not get back together until he apologized to him. This is undeniable proof that he started to value himself.

After he and his friends were subjected to physical bullying by Eddie, he asked him and his group to stop what they were doing, However, when August realized that they were older and he would not be able to defeat them, he was able to escape with his friends. After his friends reported the incident to the school, everyone began praising August for his bravery. All the children in the school eventually concluded that August is very amusing and kind, tells jokes, and is helpful to others. (Sya'diyah, 39-49)

In conclusion, after Augustus became involved in society, he changed a lot, and his confidence and self-acceptance were strengthened, until he was able to rely on himself and defend himself, and only through his humour and kindness was he able to win the hearts of all students. He proved that physical appearance is not only what makes you acceptable among people, but with good deeds and purity of heart, you can be likeable among people, so much so that you receive an award for the most likeable person in school.

> *"This year I am very proud to award the Henry Ward Beecher medal to the student whose quiet strength has carried up the most hearts. So will August Pullman please come up here to receive this award?" (Palacio, 210)*

Conclusion

These unique people find it difficult to adapt and integrate into society, face multiple forms of bullying on a daily basis. The new student may receive many negative comments and have difficulty integrating into school, and the situation will be worse if this student is physically different. These unique people do not need protection. Isolation and permanent pity because they are not people with

special needs. All they need is good treatment as normal as any normal person, warmth, support, and kindness, and he alone will be able to face society and overcome all the challenges it faces. We found that August was transformed from an isolated, unhappy, lonely, and low-self-confidence person (before confronting society) to a self-confident and beloved person who has many friends and has made many positive changes that qualify him to be an effective element in society. So, the best solution to this dangerous phenomenon is to raise awareness of the importance of the concept of self-acceptance and building self-confidence with the moral support provided by family, friends, and even teachers.

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