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CINEMATHERAPY: LIBRARY ENGAGEMENT OF CARTOONS AND ANIMATIONS AS SUPPRESSANTS OF BULLYING TENDENCIES AMONG IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Bullying is becoming endemic, posing a major challenge confronting in-school adolescents around the world and it manifests in several dimensions. Bullying involves use of words, actions, situations, events and several elements to intentionally inflict pain, ridicule, limit and subject an individual to an inconvenient situation. This paper reviewed literature on intervention programmes to curb bullying among in-school adolescents with focus on the use of cartoons and animations, however it was found that works that focused on use of cartoons and animation to reduce bullying through cinematherapy were very few. The paper reviewed pointed out the causes of bullying such as Individual Factors (Poor self-concept, Physical disabilities, Poor social skills, Early aggressiveness); Family Factors (Parenting styles, Domestic violence; Economic capability of the family); School Factors (Overcrowded schools; Inexperienced Teachers); Neighborhood Factors (Toxic Bars and Parks, Negative Neighborhood Influencers).
Keywords: *Cinematherapy, Bullying, Adolescents, Library Cartoons, Animations*

Introduction
Animation newly released by UNESCO (2023) on bullying is a confirmation of the fact that animations and cartoons have been recognized as appealing media contents that could affect the attitude and behaviors of in-school adolescents. It is also an affirmation that bullying requires the use of several intervention programmes and unconventional approaches. Bullying is reaching the endemic stage as it has become a major challenge confronting in-school adolescents around the world and it manifests in several dimensions. Age, language, height, colour, culture, race, sex and several issues could become objects of bullying. Bullying involves use of words, actions, situations, events and several elements to intentionally inflict pain, ridicule, limit and subject an individual to inconvenient situation. As noted by Xu, Ren, Li, Wang and Wang (2022), it is usually perpetrated among peers and it could also emanate from superiors in schools. While it is not limited to Nigeria, several reports in recent times suggest that it could be on the increase among in-school adolescents in Nigeria (Umoke et al., 2020).

It is therefore pertinent to rethink and strategize innovative methods of communicating prevention of bullying among in-school adolescents. Several educators in developed countries have been considering cartoons and animations as alternative educational tools (Zhang, 2021; Muhammad, 2023). This is based on the discovery that children and youths have attraction towards animations and cartoons. Although it has been noted that animations and cartoons could elicit positive and negative attitudes in children, another school of thought believes that right choice of cartoons by professionals could reduce bullying among in-school adolescents. Animated cartoons could play an important role in youth engagement and learning (Gouri et al., 2018).

It is important to pay close attention to bullying among in-school adolescents because of the negative impact it could have on their current lifestyle, academics and the future. Children and young adults that are victims of bullying could have abnormal development with attendant negative consequences in adulthood. They may lose sense of decency, develop fear, act irrationally, be dominated by fear and ultimately lose their minds or lives (Fenny & Falola, 2020).

Causes of Bullying

Several factors have been identified as causes of bullying among in-school adolescents. As a multifactorial phenomenon, bullying can be linked to family issues, community, peers, school, social media and several others. For the purpose of this paper, some of the most common factors responsible for emergence of bullying among in-school adolescents are as follows:

Individual Factors:

Apart from the general characteristics of adolescents, there are factors that are peculiar to individuals. These factors could be because of temperament, environment, self-concept and several others. Some of those factors are being discussed below:

Poor Self-Concept: Poor self-concept is an important individual factor linked to bullying behaviour and victimization among adolescents. Students with negative self-perceptions may develop insecurity, low self-esteem, and suspicion that peers intend to ridicule them. For example, those who see themselves as unattractive may resent peers they consider more attractive. Likewise, some may feel threatened by peers perceived as richer, more intelligent, or more popular. These feelings of inferiority may lead to aggression, destruction of property, or academic sabotage. In contrast, adolescents with poor self-concept may also become victims of bullying because low confidence and submissive behaviour can make them easy targets. Thus, poor self-concept may contribute to both bullying perpetration and victimization(Masoumi, Bourbour, Edling, Gill & Francia, 2024)

Physical disabilities: Physical disabilities could be because of biological negativities, injuries resulting from accidents or certain manmade occurrences. The physically challenged in this instance could be the bully or the bullied. When the physically challenged is the bully, such gets infuriated easily at anything that resembles mockery of their disabilities, even when the incidence does not refer to them. They also sometimes use their disabilities to take advantage of others. They sometimes accuse other students of cheating them when the reverse is the case. On other occasions, physically challenged students are sometimes objects of

ridicule among their mates. They call them all sorts of names to demoralize them and make them feel unwanted, leading to social exclusion. Social exclusion is a form of bullying that could have long-term effect on the psychological well-being of students (Malamut, Trach, Garandeau, &Salmivalli, 2023).

Poor social skills: some adolescents have poor social and relational skills that impede their proper integration into the larger society. Some students interact with technology at the expense of human beings around them, hence they treat people like machines. They do not have the culture of respect, communal living and empathy. They are self-centered and unidimensional in their approach to life. They do not see others to have better opinion than theirs. When things appear not to favour them, they could turn it to violence. Their behaviours could be because of poor upbringing or some learning gaps. Such students could constantly be involved in the act of bullying (Palade & Pascal, 2023).

Early aggressiveness: Early aggressiveness could be traced to several factors. Among those factors are parental neglect, polygamous environment, early bullying, violent environment, loss of parents and several other issues that are easily overlooked. Parents also unconsciously expose children to violent movies, cartoon and animations at early stage and this could propel act of violence in them. Uncontrolled access to media content such as wrestling, boxing, Kung-Fu and other violent contents could make children develop aggressive behaviours at an early stage. There have been cases of children that finished watching movies and went ahead to practice what they saw in movies, using knives on other kids (Walters, 2021)

Family Factors

Family factors are directly related to issues peculiar to the family where a child is raised. They revolve around the type of family, their culture, standard of living, parenting style, environment where the family is situated and several other issues. Some of them are discussed for more clarifications. As noted by Che (2022), the family plays a significant role in the entire outcome of a child.

Parenting styles: styles adopted by parents in grooming their children could directly or indirectly influence their negative or positive behaviors. Some bullies developed the art of bullying based on how they were handled by their parents. Some parents are too harsh in disciplining (hitting or beating) their children to the point that these children believe that the best way to communicate is to hit someone. In some climes, parents that practice laissez-faire parenting style do not correct their children when they notice violent habits in them. The children are permitted to drink, smoke and engage in wrong associations that could lead them into acts of bullying. Parents stand a better place to determine the behavioral pattern of their children but in some cases, those parents do not really give thought to how their actions and inactions affect their children (**Asatiani &Mamphoria, 2025).**

Domestic violence: Some children grew up in violent homes where parents usually fight. Their idea of male/female relationship may be awkward as the people that raised them did not give them the right examples. They have witnessed their parents beating each other and they have seen occasions where their parents are involved in violent fights with friends and

neighbors. Children in such environments are disoriented, confused and may end up as bullies (Ilori et al., 2025).

Economic capability of the family: Poverty and riches have tendencies to bring out bullying tendencies in children. Some children believe that because their parents lavish money on them, they can oppress their mates with the money they have. They go to the extent of using their mates to run errands for them. Some at the secondary school level use their mates as bodyguards who they send to deal with other mates perceived to be rude to them. On the other hand, there are those from poor families who are so desperate to the point of forcefully taking belongings of others. They threaten their mates to bring food, money and other material resources. Parents need to help their children to know that whatever they have or do not have should not determine their actions. They should live based on principles and philosophies that could help them to integrate properly into society and demonstrate high level of integrity and discipline (Dong & Jiang, 2025).

School Factors

Overcrowded schools: There are schools that have population beyond the control of available teachers. Public schools in some cases are breeding grounds for bullying as the teachers find it hard to control the number of students. There are also private schools that go beyond the recommended quota to admit students beyond the required number per class. In Nigeria especially, there are private schools that do not have principles of integrity. Such school owners are mainly focused on profit, hence they tolerate several students because they are of the opinion that if the standard of discipline is too hard, they may lose students and which would negatively influence their profitability (Gqwabaza, 2025).

Inexperienced / Novice Teachers: There are teachers in schools whose major aims are to disseminate academic instructions and guide students to succeed academically. They are not concerned about emotional issues or challenges that students face. The fact that there are school counsellors does not imply that teachers should not get involved in counselling students to know their state (Chobphon, 2025).

Types of Bullying

There are several ways through which bullying manifests. A few of them are presented as follows: physical, verbal and cyber bullying.

Physical bullying: It has to do with the use of hands, legs, head, body parts and objects to inflict pain on the bullied. Apart from inflicting pain on a person, destruction of physical and intellectual properties such as buildings, cars, books and other personal belongings are also involved. Physical bullying appears to be the most visible of other types of bullying. It may however be surprising that other types of bullying take place more frequently than physical bullying. The challenge with other types of bullying is that they are not always reported. Physical bullying is easy to see while others are hidden. For instance, cyber bullying, psychological bullying and social bullying could be happening silently without the knowledge of any other person except the parties involved. Physical bullying on the other

hand generates noise as it involves kicking, stabbing, stealing, pinching, hitting, shootıng and several other acts. In-school adolescents most times engage in physical bullying to show who is more powerful, show dominance and control (Chen et al., 2024).

Verbal bullying: It has to do with negative pronouncements, vulgar languages and uncensored words used against victims with the intention to ridicule, disorientate, and humiliate them. It is assumed to be commonly used among female gender. It has however not been empirically established that females are more involved in verbal bullying than males. Words have weight and power; and how individuals respond to the words differ from one person to another. There have been cases of individuals that responded to verbal abuse by committing suicide. Words could destroy the self-concept of some adolescents, believing there is nothing special about them based on negative things that others have said about them. Verbal bullying tends to have long-term effect on the victim and if care is not taken, it may be a lifetime torment for the victim. It is usually recommended that such bullying should not be handled by non-professionals for victims to fully recover (Barus &Safitri, 2023).

Cyber bullying: Cyber bullying has to do with engaging information and communication technologies and the internet to carry out the act of bullying. Information and communication technologies, access to phones and internet have made cases of cyber bullying rampant. Pictures, texts, videos, diagrams, drawings, voice notes and several other media contents and tools are usually engaged to perpetrate cyber bullying. Nude pictures of peers could be circulated to ridicule, attack and extort money. Derogatory messages could be sent continuously to a person to demoralize such individual. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, E- mail, WhatsApp and several other media platforms are engaged by bullies to perpetrate bullying. Cyber bullying is very dangerous in the sense that the reputation of an individual could be destroyed within a short period of time. Cyber bullying could increase anxiety, lead to psychological trauma, and suicide. It could also promote violence as the bullied may not have any other choice than to physically attack the bully (Lim & Chng, 2023).

Engaging Cinematherapy (Cartoons and Animations) as Suppressants of Bullying Tendencies

Cinematherapy, also known as film therapy or reel therapy, is a psychotherapeutic approach that uses films to explore emotions, enhance cognitive processing, and promote personal growth. By identifying with characters and narratives, individuals can reflect on personal experiences and address psychological concerns. This approach has been found beneficial for individuals, families, and groups (Dike &Asigbo, 2021). When in-school adolescents are given professional guidance through cinematherapy sessions, the tendency is so high that it makes a high impression on them and they could identify with characters and subject matter of the contents of the cinema. Specifically, cartoons and animations which have been found to be appealing to in-school adolescents could be engaged during cinematherapy sessions to curb bullying (Shiu et al., 2020).

Importance of Cartoons and Animations

The logical, linguistic, visual-spatial, musical, interpersonal, kinetic and intrapsychic intelligence as earlier discussed are affected by motion pictures (cartoon and animation). Beyond the books which work more on imagination as applicable in bibliotherapy, the cinematherapyis going to affect all these forms of intelligence of the in-school adolescents.

Innovative approaches beyond the traditional method of teaching have been a subject of discussion in recent times and the use of cartoons and animation falls within the scheme of innovative teaching. In-school adolescents particularly have flair for cartoon and animations, hence the need to explore their area of interest to communicate dangers of bullying to them (Shiu et al., 2020). Advanced countries have used animations and cartoons as leverages for innovation in teaching and learning process, because they give students a more dynamic learning experience. Use of animations has been strongly encouraged as an innovative, constructive and student-centered alternative to the traditional learning approaches in many countries. Cartoons and animations are engaging, captivating and interesting, hence students desire to view them and they do not see them as boring as books (Jaafar and Sahil, 2018).

The Cinematherapy Process

Cinematherapy is distinct from the casual recommendation of films, cartoons, or animations for entertainment or moral instruction. It is a structured therapeutic intervention in which carefully selected audio-visual materials are used under professional guidance to promote emotional reflection, cognitive restructuring, behavioural adjustment, and psychological growth. Recent studies indicate that film-based therapeutic approaches can facilitate emotional processing, identity exploration, and coping development across different populations (Rajaei & El-Ammouri, 2026).

Some preliminary stages are presented below:

Selection and Evaluation of Therapeutic Materials

The effectiveness of cinematherapy depends largely on the appropriateness of the selected material. Films or animations should be chosen with consideration for the client's age, developmental stage, culture, religious orientation, literacy level, emotional needs, and presenting problem. For adolescents with bullying tendencies, materials that model empathy, emotional regulation, inclusion, resilience, and constructive peer relationships are preferable. Conversely, content that glorifies aggression or normalizes humiliation should be avoided. Reviews of media-based therapeutic interventions for young people emphasize the importance of developmental suitability and professional guidance (Zhang et al., 2025).

Rapport-Building and Pre-Viewing Discussion

Before viewing, the therapist should establish rapport through a relaxed discussion of the client's experiences, emotions, school relationships, and behavioural concerns. This stage reduces resistance and prepares the adolescents for reflective engagement with the therapeutic material. Adolescents may be reassured that peer conflict, emotional confusion, and identity struggles are common developmental experiences. A strong therapeutic alliance remains central to successful adolescent interventions (Li, Ding, & Li, 2023).

Client Orientation and Preparation

The client should be informed that the viewing exercise is therapeutic rather than recreational. Expectations regarding attention, emotional honesty, and post-viewing reflection should be clarified. The therapist may also determine whether the client should watch individually, in a group, or with supervision. A calm and distraction-free environment is recommended to improve concentration and emotional immersion (Sacilotto et al., 2022).

Guided Viewing Process

During viewing, clients are encouraged to observe characters, emotions, consequences of actions, moral choices, and conflict resolution patterns. In some cases, therapists may provide reflection prompts or ask clients to note scenes that appear personally meaningful. Audio-visual narratives have been shown to activate empathy, perspective-taking, and self-referential thinking, which are useful therapeutic mechanisms (Pannu & Goyal, 2025).

Debriefing and Reflective Dialogue

Post-viewing discussion is one of the most important stages of cinematherapy. The therapist explores the client's emotional reactions, favourite or disliked characters, lessons learned, and perceived connections to personal life. Open-ended questioning encourages deeper insight. The therapist should facilitate discussion without imposing rigid interpretations, allowing the client to construct meaning collaboratively. Narrative-based therapeutic approaches support such reflective dialogue among adolescents (Rajaei & El-Ammouri, 2026).Cinematherapy should ideally be facilitated by trained counsellors, psychologists, librarians with counselling competence, or other helping professionals. Essential competencies include empathy, active listening, emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, communication skills, and the ability to manage emotional reactions that may arise during sessions (Li et al., 2023).

Therapeutic Stages in Cinematherapy

Identification/Recognition Stage: At this stage, the client identifies with a character, event, or emotional experience in the film. The adolescent may recognize personal similarities with a bully, victim, bystander, or supportive peer. Such identification can increase self-awareness and reduce denial. Character identification has been shown to assist identity exploration and meaning-making among adolescents (Rajaei & El-Ammouri, 2026).

Catharsis/Emotional Release: Recognition may lead to emotional release through tears, silence, laughter, remorse, or verbal disclosure. Previously suppressed feelings such as anger, shame, loneliness, fear, or grief may emerge. Emotional expression is often a precursor to therapeutic progress (Pannu & Goyal, 2025).

***Insight/Reframing Stage*:** After emotional processing, the client may begin to reinterpret previous attitudes and behaviours. Adolescents who bully others may understand the harm caused by aggression, while victims may develop healthier self-perceptions and coping strategies. This stage is central to behavioural modification (Sacilotto et al., 2022).

***Universalization/Self-Application Stage*:** At this stage, clients realize that their struggles are shared by others. Feelings of isolation are reduced, and lessons from the film are transferred into daily life. Adolescents may begin to practise empathy, anger management, respectful communication, or help-seeking behaviour (Zhang et al., 2025).

Conclusion

Bullying remains a major challenge among in-school adolescents, but it is manageable through evidence-informed interventions. Cinematherapy offers an innovative and youth-friendly strategy, especially when implemented through carefully selected cartoons and animations. Because audio-visual narratives engage emotional, cognitive, and social

processes simultaneously, they can promote empathy, self-reflection, and prosocial behaviour. When professionally guided, cinematherapy can complement school counselling, library services, and anti-bullying programmes (Rajaei & El-Ammouri, 2026; Zhang et al., 2025).

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