

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF BULLYING IN THE PYRAMID GAME SERIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA X

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ABSTRACT

Bullying is one of the social deviant behaviors that often occur in all environments, including schools. This study aims to determine the description of bullying and the meaning of signs contained in the series "Pyramid Game" on social media X through semiotics using Charles Sanders Pierce's theory. Each scene in this drama is decomposed into signs, objects, and interpretations that describe the dynamics of bullying behavior. The method used is descriptive qualitative, with a semiotic approach to analyze and explain how the meaning of signs regarding bullying occurs. The results of the analysis show various forms of bullying, ranging from physical violence, threats, sexual harassment, to social exclusion. Teachers have a major role in creating a safe, comfortable, and moral learning environment. Based on this research, it can be concluded that the importance of awareness and action to prevent and overcome bullying behavior, both in the school environment and society at large. Netizens responding to these scenes provide a deep understanding of the importance of awareness about negative behavior: bullying.

INTRODUCTION

Humans with their various characters are connected to each other through social groups, but often this does not result in the expected harmony or balance. On the contrary, sometimes social deviant behaviors appear, such as bullying or bullying. The school environment is one of the places where bullying often occurs. Based on the information presented detik.com, the Federation of Indonesia Teachers' Unions (FSGI) recorded 30 cases of bullying throughout 2023. The distribution is 50% at the junior high school level, 30% at the elementary level, 10% at the high school and vocational school levels. This is an increase from the previous year where FSGI only recorded 21 cases of bullying.

Drama series have a function as an audio-visual communication medium that not only aims to entertain but also to convey information and can even arouse emotions from the audience. Film is a medium to convey messages from communicators to communicators. Film is not only a medium for conveying messages to one or two communicators, but the wider community. This research, if associated with a series, must all be focused on mass communication, where this mass communication

becomes a bridge from communicator to communicator to convey messages in various things such as images or symbols that will be reviewed more deeply through this research. (Afkarina & Aminuddin, 2023) (Kurniasih et al., 2023)

The researcher used the Pyramid Game series as the object of research. This Pyramid Game has a total of 10 episodes which premiered on February 29, 2024, this drama tells how Sung Sooji, a transfer student who is required to participate in a popularity voting game called Pyramid Game, in the game is divided into 5 levels if we don't get votes in the vote we will get an F grade, which is the lowest level and will be the target of bullying in one class. To avoid bullying, Sooji inevitably has to try to climb the pyramid of popularity. Through a suspenseful storytelling, the drama adapted from this webtoon not only explores the dynamics of power, intimidation, and violence in the scene, but also represents the attitude of the audience or netizens who observe the cruel treatment from the typing given from the scenes per scene.

Thus, Pyramid Game shows many factors, in understanding this series highlights the fact that often more attention is paid to the perpetrator and victim, but often the audience who only watches the bullying is considered trivial, as a viewer, they are often considered as people who do not want to get involved, are helpless, or even considered indifferent. In fact, the role of spectators actually has a big impact on the perpetrators and victims of bullying, even if indirectly. Spectators who only watch without intervening or reporting bullying incidents are also responsible for creating an environment that supports bullying.

The use of social media with positive activities and habits will reduce bullying behavior through social media, but if the use of social media with negative activities will have negative impacts such as bullying will be more prevalent. Through this social media series, it raises many sides of bullies, victims of bullying and bullying viewers who are just "spectators", this makes the audience argue on social media, for example in X until it is talked about and trending every episode. (Wirmando et al., 2021)

Several previous studies that raised the value and theme of bullying include the title Semiotic Analysis of Representation of Ilmi et al., (2023) *Bullying Cases* in The Glory 2023 Drama (According to Roland Barthes) stating that bullies often channel boredom and seek attention by choosing targets that they consider weaker and potentially threatening. This cycle continues endlessly and forms an unbroken pattern until finally someone chooses to leave the unhealthy environment. The difference in research lies in the theory used and the focus. The previous researcher used Roland Barthes' theory and only focused on the representation of bullying in Korean dramas, while the researcher used Pierce's theory and also analyzed the responses of netizens who commented on X's social media about the bullying that occurred in it. The similarity is that they both study bullying.

One of the theories that is suitable for studying bullying in the *Pyramid Game series* is the semiotics of Charles Sanders Pierce. Pierce Semiotics is a science that analyzes the signs behind events, objects and people. This is in accordance with the researcher's goal, which is to find out the image and meaning of signs that represent *bullying* through iconic signs in the *Pyramid Game series* and these signs are able to represent existing reality. On that basis, the author chose the semiotic analysis of Pierce and the *Pyramid Game series* as research material with the research title "Semiotic Analysis of Bullying in the Pyramid Game Series on Social Media X".

METHODS

The researcher uses a qualitative descriptive approach method, trying to explain a social phenomenon in the form of bullying contained in the *Pyramid Game series* by analyzing and explaining how the representation process occurs. The researcher used Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic theory. Pierce's semiotic analysis is an analysis that analyzes signs through three meanings, namely; *sign*, *object*, and *interpretant*. The primary data source obtained directly from the research subjects is by analyzing *scenes* or scenes related to bullying signs. The secondary data sources are obtained from journals and articles that are still related to the research topic. The data collection technique used is direct observation by watching the *Pyramid Game series* and then observing and analyzing scenes or things

that happen in *the scene* as well as the responses of netizens in X, the researcher classifies the data by *capturing scenes* that are considered to represent bullying in the Korean series.

RESULTS

The following is an analysis of semiotics in *the Pyramid Game* series by *Lee Jae Gyun* that researchers carefully use the semiotics theory of *Charles Sanders Pierce*, as follows.

Table 1. Pierce's *Semiotic Analysis* episode 1



Figure 1. Scene *Pyramid Game* Eps.1

<i>Sign</i>	The act of throwing the ball at <i>Myoung Jaeun</i> with his legs and hands tied, <i>Bang Woo I</i> also said "whoever knows he is ostracized".
<i>Object</i>	<i>Myoung Jaeun</i> , was held in a sports warehouse and physically bullied.
<i>Playing</i>	<i>Myeong Jaeun</i> experiences physical bullying so he experiences emotional distress, while at the same time realizing and resigning that he is F-level and will definitely be ostracized

The scene in Episode 1 of the arrest with hands and feet tied while being thrown a ball in a sports warehouse shows *Myoung Jaeun* getting physical *bullying* behavior from what *Kim Dayeon* and his henchmen did. And *Myoung Jaeun* who closed his eyes indicated that he was experiencing emotional distress, especially after hearing *Wooyi's* words "who knows he is ostracized", he became more aware and resigned to being treated like that. The following is the next scene that the author researched, namely the indecent touch in front of the teacher in episode 2, minute 38.10

Table 2. Pierce's *Semiotic Analysis* episode 2



Figure 2. Scene *Pyramid Game* Eps.2



Figure 3. Scene *Pyramid Game* Eps.2

<i>Sign</i>	a) The students are in the field b) <i>Sooji</i> gets her chest touched by her classmates c) Teachers just look
<i>Object</i>	<i>Sooji</i> doesn't fight back when her friend interrupts her by touching her chest
<i>Playing</i>	<i>Sooji</i> gets bullying in the form of sexual bullying in the field by her friends, even they don't hesitate to do it in front of the teachers but the teacher only sees her because she is afraid

Based on the *analysis of the scene* in episode 2, *Sooji* gets an inappropriate touch on the field during gym time, the act indicates sexual harassment committed by her friends and they do it in the open and crowded to show that they are at a higher level than the victim of *bullying*. Although the *bullying* incident was witnessed by the teachers, the teachers could not take a stance because they were not allowed to interfere with the game they were playing, if the teachers interfered they would get a warning from Harin as the grandson of the owner of the foundation through the Principal. This also shows that having *power* can influence and or control people who are at a lower level. The following is the next scene that the author researched, namely bullying in the form of exclusion in episode 3, minute 25.55

Table 3. Pierce's *Semiotic Analysis* episode 3



Figure 4. Scene Pyramid Game Eps.3

<i>Sign</i>	a) <i>Jiae</i> is shunned by her classmates and is dressed up like a cat by <i>Wooyi</i> b) <i>Wooyi</i> offers a cat treat for <i>Jiae</i> to eat
<i>Object</i>	<i>Wooyi</i> puts on <i>Jiae's</i> makeup to resemble a cat and tells her to eat cat food in front of all her classmates
<i>Playing</i>	<i>Jiae</i> is shunned by her classmates and treated like an animal indicating she is being bullied for social exclusion, her position being at the F level requires her to resign herself to the consequences of the game she participated in

Based on the scene analysis in episode 3, it was explained that *Pyo Jiae* was shunned by her classmates and her face resembled a cat and told her to eat cat food in front of all her classmates was interpreted as social exclusion. Her existence at the F level indicates that *Jiae* is losing the popularity game, so she has to accept the consequences of being bullied by someone who is higher than *Jiae*. The following is the next scene that the author researched, namely bullying in the form of threats in episode 8, minute 39.02.

Table 4. Pierce's *Semiotics Analysis* episode 8



Figure 5. Scene Pyramid Game Eps.8

<i>Sign</i>	"go back to being F," <i>Baek Harin</i> said to <i>Myeong Jaeun</i> to return to the F level
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Object *Baek Harin* cuts his own hair in front of *Myeong Jaeun* as he threatens to return to F tier if he doesn't, *Sung Sooji* is the one who replaces *Jaeun* to F tier

Playing *Harin's* command to return to F level is a threat to *Myeong Jaeun* and makes him very depressed. And *Harin's* action of cutting his hair in front of *Jaeun* shows that he will not give up to continue getting what he wants

Based on the scene analysis in episode 8, the sentence of the order that *Myeong Jaeun* gets to return to F level is a form of threat from *Harin* that makes *Jaeun* very depressed, because if he doesn't obey him, his friend *Sooji* will replace *Jaeun* in F level. The following is the next scene that the author researched, namely the flashback of physical bullying in episode 10, minute 22.58

Table 5. *Pierce's Semiotic Analysis* episode 10



Figure 6. *Scene Pyramid Game Eps.3*

Sign *Flashback Sung Sooji* becomes F-rank, he is *physically* bullied

Object *Sung Sooji* became the object of physical violence such as being hit, kicked, stepped on, on a handkerchief committed by *Kim Dayeon, Bang Wooyi* and *Ku Sol Ha*

Playing The bullying flashback scene indicates that *Sung Sooji* has traumatized, then *Sung Sooji* becomes brave to take steps to no longer want to be at the F level, showing an increase in the character of the victim to fight back

Based on the analysis of the *flashback scene* in episode 10, *Sooji* is still a victim of bullying by her classmates, which is the starting point for *Sooji* to want a change in what has happened in her class. *Sooji* takes the initiative to destroy the *Pyramid Game* made by *Harin* showing that the victim of bullying has experienced an increase in character due to his trauma, and it is proven to be successful, as evidenced in episode 9 that all the students in his class delete this hierarchical game according to the strategy that *Sooji* made.

Based on the results of the analysis, several types of *bullying* were found that occurred in the *Pyramid Game* series:

1. **Non-Verbal Bullying:** Non-verbal bullying, in other words, physically occurs in the ball *throwing scene* in episode 1, characterized by throwing a ball at the victim while having his feet and hands tied with duct tape as well as his mouth. As well as the *flashback scene* in episode 10 which was marked by physical violence in the form of being hit, kicked, and handcuffed. In a comment on social media X a netizen wrote a comment that represented his feelings while watching the pyramid game, in episode 1 a netizen named @xxxbonnimg who replied on the K-drama account Menfess wrote: "I think it's crazy this is bgt! What is something to be proud of, by bullying?". In this case, the sentence expresses anger at the bullying experienced by *Jaeun*. Users questioned the morality of the perpetrator and questioned *Solha's* strength in dealing with the situation.

Another comment written @ruberude99 wrote: " Eps 10 In my opinion, sooji has a strong character in dealing with the bullying, but when the scen he was bullied really hurt punched kicked thrown by the dayeon gang!! Yes, it's all because Baek Harin abused his power by making this pyramid game for revenge". Looking at the research from netizens' comments on episode 10, it can be concluded that this netizen's statement illustrates how strong Sooji's character is in dealing with bullying, but also highlights the injustice and suffering she experienced due to the actions of Baek Harin and the Dayeon gang.

2. Social Exclusion: The act of exclusion occurs in episode 3, marked by the victim's shunning by all his classmates and being treated like an animal. In a comment on social media X, a netizen named @qiqi wrote: "I hate Bang Wooyi so much. I better see Dayeon than he does. He only took advantage by being Dayeon's henchman. I will wait for the day when he will be at the F level". Which has been translated into Indonesian. From the analysis and comments of netizens, @qiqi as the owner of the account commented expressing displeasure with Wooyi's behavior. He sees Wooyi as someone who only takes advantage of Dayeon's henchmen. Netizens also expressed their hope to see Wooyi at the F grade level one day. Wooyi's actions towards Jiae are rated negative and considered a form of bullying. Netizens also expressed their preference for other characters and disapproval of Wooyi's treatment of Jiae.
3. Sexual Bullying : Sexual bullying occurs in episode 2, characterized by touching the victim's chest in the open. In a comment on social media X, a netizen named @simcheong wrote: "I just watched eps 2 of the pyramid game, .. Wow, I can't imagine if I'm in Sooji's position, am I capable? ... Omg!! Don't say any more, the teachers are silent? Are the teachers on the side of Baek Harin? They are all the same, huftt". Judging from the research of the comment, this is a statement that shows that the audience feels disappointed and angry at the injustice that occurred in the drama. They question the role of teachers and question whether they are really on the right side.
4. Threats: A form of bullying in the form of threats occurs in episode 8, the saying "go back to level F, otherwise Sooji will take your place" indicates that there is bullying from the perpetrator who aims to control the victim. In a comment on social media X a netizen named @kaya wrote: "Hahaha, watching this pyramid game, I think eps 8 baek harin managed to make jaeun depressed like that, He's really smart at influencing jaeun, baek harin lu tu tu just hiding in your grandmother's armpit !! Remember lu.. greget gw sm baek harin". Looking at the research From the comment, it can be seen that Baek Harin has the ability to influence others, as happened to the character The depressed feelings felt by Jaeun are the interpreter of Baek Harin's negative influence.

According to Ki Hadjar Dewantara, education must prioritize the principle of inclusiveness or in other words every individual regardless of background, social status or ability, has the same right to get quality education so that it can create a school environment that is far from bullying. Teachers play a central role in creating a safe, comfortable, and morally integrity learning environment.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis conducted on the "Pyramid Game" series using Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic approach, it can be concluded that various forms of bullying occur ranging from non-verbal bullying, social exclusion, sexual bullying, to threats. Each scene in this series provides a real picture of the psychological and emotional impact felt by victims of bullying. Bully spectators who only watch without taking any intervention or reporting bullying incidents are also responsible for creating an environment that supports bullying. Also, this series shows that a person or group with *power* can control and justify all means to achieve their goals.

Comments from netizens on social media also reflected a strong reaction to the bullying scenes in the series, suggesting that viewers felt empathy, anger, and disappointment at the unfair and

inhumane treatment. Thus, the "Pyramid Game" series is not only an entertainment medium, but also a reflection of social reality that depicts the complexity and negative impact of bullying.

In the context of education, it is important for teachers and all parties in the school environment to ensure the existence of a safe, inclusive, and bullying-free learning environment. An inclusive education that considers each individual's right to a quality education without discrimination is key to preventing and addressing bullying in the educational environment.

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