Ishida Shōya's Character Arc
in a Silent Voice Film

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Abstract: Bullying is one social issue that is complicated and hard to solve. Many boys and girls have suffered a lot because of bullying every year. Some of them choose suicide as the option to end the problem. This issue is so common in Japan that it is reflected in many media, especially in the form of film. Which has become a part of the existing culture in society. *A Silent Voice* is one such film that tells the story of bullying through Ishida Shōya's eyes during his elementary and middle school. Through Shōya's character, the objective of this study is to show that people who are bullied can develop characteristics that are reflected in Ishida Shōya. In this study, the researcher will use the social psychology of aggression theory (Krahe, 2001) and film theory (Klarer, 2005). The first theory is used to analyze the characteristics change in Ishida Shōya while the second theory is used to analyze the dialogue that shows the developed characteristics. This study is a literary analysis and the method used in this study is selecting and grouping from two sources of data, primary and secondary data. The primary data is in the form of *A Silent Voice* film and the secondary is in the form of books and online journals. This study shows that bullying (*Ijime*) and harassment he goes through during elementary and middle school play a big role in changing his characteristics. Labeling, vandalizing, and scapegoating Shōya were the triggers that changed his characteristics once he was in high school. Consequently, Shōya developed introversion, depression, and social anxiety characteristics in high school.

Keywords: bullying; film theory; ijime; social psychology

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In every part of the world, school bullying can occur commonly among youth. It is a complicated issue with many things that are still unclear to grasp and hard to solve. The number of bullying cases has been rising rapidly until it touched the figure of more than 610.000 cases in Japan just before the pandemic hit (Nippon.com, 2020). Furthermore, the fiscal 2020 report dropped for the first time after a continuous increase for the past seven years. Based on the survey from the education ministry, the cases decreased 15.6% from the previous year. It touched the number of more than 510.000 cases of bullying during the pandemic (Nippon.com, 2021). The cases from elementary school are still leading the number and it followed by junior high school, senior high school, and special-needs school by 2019. Many of the cases involved minor incidents such as name-calling, teasing, or insult while the major ones could lead to absenteeism and even suicide.

Along with the reports, bullying, in general, is treated as a pre-planned action against a single victim who cannot properly act in self-defense when facing continuous hostile action by one or more individuals (Olweus, 1993). In short, it implies a kind of power inequity between the bully and the bullied. The difference in physique or social status may be used by the bully in the interest of creating a gap to justify the social power against the victim. People's shortcomings such as their looks, personality, family circumstances, a dilemma at hand are also a target of bullying to attain social power and damage the victim. Several actions include verbal assault (e.g., belittling the name of the victim or blackmailing them), physical assault (e.g., punching, throwing victim's property, or pushing them), and social hostility (e.g., social rejection from the group or making a false rumor about the victim) are the act of bullying as stated by (Monks & Smith, 2006), (Olweus, 1993), (Smith, 2014).

Furthermore, there is an aspect that makes bullying or *ijime* in Japan commonly happen. The Japanese Education Ministry (MEXT, 2014) settled it as something that "*can happen to any children at any school*." This statement is also supported by the views of several experts on bullying such as Yoneyama (2015) and Taki (2007) who state; everyone in the group has the same chance in turn of being the victim at any educational institution and the role of perpetrator and victim is easy to reverse. Amidst this model of bullying, many media in Japan tried to portray this issue and one film manage to stand out among the rest. *A Silent Voice* (Yamada, 2016) is a work directed by Naoko Yamada in 2016, it tells about the redemption of an ex-school bully, Ishida Shōya, who became the victim of his action. After he was severely bullied during elementary and middle school, his characteristics change and get worse as the suicidal thoughts got the better of him.

Considering this issue of bullying, this study is made to show that the people who are bullied can develop certain characteristics. Often leads to negative characteristics as it can draw out suicidal thoughts in the experience of being bullied. Much like what happened to Shōya as he struggles with his new characteristics. In studying the issue, this study hopes to raise the awareness of many people as "*bullying damages human dignity*" (Mashimo, 2017) and it will continue to escalate if not tackled early. Including, to hope that more people in need will immediately reach out to get help as soon as possible. Since different people can tolerate the pain inflicted by bullying varies, outsiders never know when someone will reach their limit and choose the option that will ease their pain. Therefore, bullying is an unacceptable act since it can destroy the foundation of someone that they have been painstakingly built throughout their life. In other words, bullying can erase and devastate someone's dignity.

As stated before, bullying or *ijime* is a common occurrence. It does not only happen in Japan but bullying has already become a serious global issue that everyone needs to recognize. However, Japan has acknowledged that even insignificant behaviors such as name-calling or teasing are considered as a form of bullying (ijime). Therefore, it is important to study the change in characteristics as a result of bullying.

Accordingly, two of the research questions for this study are;
1. What are the types of bullying that Ishida Shōya experienced?
2. What is the change from characteristics of Ishida Shōya in the aftermath of bullying?

The answer to these two research questions after the analysis and its conclusion will be discussed in the last two heading titles of this study.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Social Psychology of Aggression Theory

Social psychology is focused on how humans interpret situations during their interaction process with others and these interpretations are influenced by their behaviors, feelings, and thoughts (Ross & Nisbert, 1991). The relationship between humans that are influenced by behaviors, feelings, and thoughts can give birth to a response that is either destructive or constructive.

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According to Krahe (2001 p. 119), bullying is considered a form of aggression because it happened among peers. Bullying typically occurs continuously in extended-term periods and does not happen in just one-time events. It will also leave the victims in a sustained state of anxiety and intimidation (Krahe, 2001). Moreover, the victim of bullying also suffers from depression, suicidal tendencies, social withdrawal, emotional dysregulation, low self-esteem, loneliness, school avoidance, peer rejection, and lack of friends (DeLara, 2016); Hodges & Perry, 1999). Krahe (2001) also mentions that the cruel acts of bullying involve direct (physical, verbal, or material harassment) and indirect forms (social rejection from group or exclusion).

Conclusively, the form of aggression which is bullying along with its consequences mentioned by Krahe (2001) will be used as an understanding for Ishida Shōya's character development. The reported result on the effects of bullying by DeLara (2016) along with Hodges and Perry (1999) also participate to support Krahe's (2001) claims in this regard.

Film Theory

A film is often classified as a performing art in which an actor used in a film as the crucial role to express the meaning of the film itself (Klarer, 2004). The acts performed by the actor in a film is not just in the people's imagination like in the novel, but it can be seen directly during the performance. At its heart, a film is a moving picture and thus made visual element as the major power for the film. Despite its compatibility with typical elements in the novel---diverse narrative techniques, the experimental structure of the plot, foreshadowing and flashback, change of setting, and time structure---the film only manages to show the portion of these many techniques.

As the film is heavily dependent on technical aspects, Mario Klarer (2004) in *An Introduction to Literary Studies* divided the important elements of film into the dimensions of space, time, and sound.

Space or spatial dimensions include film stock, lighting, framing, camera angle, camera movement, point of view, editing, and montage. Whereas time or temporal dimensions include slow and fast motion, plot time, length of film, flashback, and foreshadowing. In addition to sound or acoustic dimension, it will include dialogue, music, and sound effect.

Conclusively, dialogue elements from the acoustic dimension derived from Klarer (2004) will be used to analyze the excerpts (written lines) of the film.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study focuses on the dialogue of *A Silent Voice* film. Therefore, literary analysis and two sources of data, primary and secondary data, will be used. The primary data source for this study is *A Silent Voice* film by Naoko Yamada as the director and her team in Kyoto Animation. Secondary data sources for this study are online journals, books, as well as publications about the related literature to character and characterization. The data about the film is presented in the form of written excerpts which will be analyzed under the acoustic dimension that will cover dialogue.

The data collection method in this study is through selecting and grouping the dialogues that reflect Krahe's claim (2001) on the consequences of bullying, the stages of this are:

To begin with, the first stage is to watch *A Silent Voice* film to find out about the plot. The second stage is to re-watch to film to observe the types of bullying (*ijime*) and developed characteristics of Ishida Shōya. The third stage is to identify the excerpts (dialogues) that support the claim through selecting and grouping method. The fourth stage is to determine the result of the claim based on the analyzed excerpts by using theories. The fifth stage is a synchronization of the claim or in other words, is giving a full map of what happened to Ishida Shōya after he became the victim of bullying (*ijime)*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The claim presented in the research finding composed the types of bullying that grouped into one of the following types: verbal assault, physical assault, and social hostility. This type of bullying is reflected from Krahe (2001) about the direct and indirect forms of bullying. Afterward, an excerpt in the form of dialogue from the film will be the indication of the bullying.

Tabel 1 types of bullying that Ishida Shōya experienced

Types of Bullying (*Ijime)*	Action
Verbal assault	Labeling Shōya as a bully
Physical assault	Vandalizing Shōya's property
Social hostility	Scapegoating Shōya

Verbal Assault

On the first day of his third year in high school, Shōya admitted that it is foolish for him to be friends with anyone at this point. He felt he had no right to have friends because he was labeled as a bully on his first day in middle school. Thus, resulted in Shōya who had to close his heart to anyone and chooses the path as a lone-wolf throughout middle school. This could be seen through the dialogue below:

```
Shōya  : On our first day of middle school, Shimada said…

Shimada : You'd better keep away from that Shōya Ishida guy. He's a bully.

(Yamada, 2016, 00:29:35 – 00:29:42)
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Shōya  : The sin I'd committed was turned back on me. With that sin on my shoulders,
I learned that I was deserving of punishment. And so……I became isolated.

(Yamada, 2016, 00:29:47 – 00:29:59)
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Based on the dialogue above, Shimada warns other students not to be friends with Shōya because he is a bully. Thus, Shōya severed ties with his classmates and cut off his means of communication with his classmates.

Physical Assault

Once the bullying (*ijime*) of Shōko during sixth grade became a problem for school administration, Shōya as the most visible aggressor turned into an easy scapegoat. Both the teacher and his classmates blamed him when the problem was confronted. The sudden stigmatization confuses him to the point that he sincerely accepts all the cruel treatments of his classmates. This could be seen through the dialogue below:

```
Miyako : Yes. Yes. I'm so sorry for all the trouble. Yes. Yes. Yes, goodbye. Shōya?
Wait, Shōya! Shōya! Your teacher told me everything. Why are you soaked through?

Shōya  : Shut up. I was jumping in the water, like always.

Miyako : Wait! Are you making trouble for anyone?

Shōya  : How should I know?

Miyako : Is it true, what the teacher said?

Shōya  : Yeah, it is!

Miyako : We're going to Nishimiya's house. You'd better get ready.

(Yamada, 2016, 00:18:27 – 00:19:12)

Miyako : Sho, we're going home. Be a good boy from now on.

Shōya  : Huh?

(Yamada, 2016, 00:20:22 – 00:20:27)

Graffiti on the desk: Get lost, Ishida.

(Yamada, 2016, 00:22:46.
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Based on the dialogue above, Shōya chooses to accept the bullying (*ijime*) and harassment from his classmates since his scapegoating. He keeps the promise with his mother to be a good boy ever since the conflict with Shōko. However, because of the scapegoating and open rejection he got, Shōya chose to succumb to the situation.

Social Hostility

After Shōya knew that Shōko does not get angry no matter how harsh the treatment is, Shōko's bullying by Shōya keeps escalating from day-to-day. Eight of her hearing aids are missing or badly damaged, thus her mother gave a complaint to the school. As soon as this became a problem for the school, Shōya's homeroom teacher immediately blamed him. This could be seen through the dialogue below:

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Mr. Takeuchi : Ishida. Look. We know it's you. Just stand up already! [bangs
chalkboard]
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All students : *gasping

Shōya        : Yes, sir.

Mr. Takeuchi : Ueno. You were next to him. What did you see?

Ueno         : Um… He did… tease her a little, I guess. That kind of thing.

Shōya        : Eh?

Mr. Takeuchi : Shimada?

Shimada             : I told him to knock it off a couple times. He wouldn't listen.

Shōya        : Eh? Shimada! You did it with me! And the girls said awful things about
her! Right? Ueno and   Kawai, especially!

Kawai        : That's awful. I never did anything like that. Why? Ishida, you're
awful.

(Yamada, 2016, 00:17:00 – 00:18:36)
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Based on the dialogue above, Shōya tried to explain the situation because he was not the only one who did bully (*ijime*) Shōko. However, he hurt another person in the process and everyone starts to agree with their homeroom teacher who was forcing the blame on him before.

The Change in Characteristics of Ishida Shōya

The claims on the change in characteristics of Ishida Shōya are introversion, depression, and social anxiety. This change is reflected in the consequences of bullying stated by Krahe (2001) and DeLara (2016) along with Hodges and Perry (1999). To understand the claimed characteristics better, a description of each of them would be given below:

According to Jung (2016), an introvert is a person who is keen on their inner self with all its prejudices, delusions, imaginations, and individualized viewpoint. They are more likely to imagine a scenario where it put them in negative situations. Introverted individuals might be quiet, reserved, and avoid attention which could make them anxious.

Depression is a universal term that refers to a sense of extreme and constant sadness. It consists of a broad spectrum of symptoms that differ between individuals. Individuals who are depressed feel gloomy, distressed, and pessimistic to the point would lose interest in activities they once enjoyed. They also often doubt the worthiness of themselves which can increase their suicide risk (Mataix-Cols et al., 2010).

Social anxiety is defined by APA (2013) as intense and consistent fear to avoid social situations in which the individual could be viewed negatively by others. The core of this problem is the individual concern that they may act in an embarrassing way like doing or saying something that might lead to rejection of others. To avoid this, they typically perform safety behaviors such as avoiding eye contact with other people.

Introversion

Due to Shōya's past actions, he minimized his interaction with others and became an introvert. By riding his bicycle, he heads to school in solitude while contemplating his recent action. Then, he tried to talk about it with Nagatsuka who declared himself as one and only Shōya's friend. This could be seen through the dialogue below:

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Shōya         : Friends… What was I saying?!
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(Yamada, 2016, 00:29:27 – 00:29:34)

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Nagatsuka     : What's wrong, Ya-sho?

Shōya         : Nothing… Ya-sho?

Nagatsuka     : Gives our relationship a real "big friend" feel. Well? Is something
                on your mind? Tell me anything. We're best friends, right?

Shōya         : Nagatsuka, look… What's the definition of "friend"? Like… what gives
                you the right to have friends? What makes you worthy. You know?
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(Yamada, 2016, 00:38:25 – 00:38:54).

Based on the two dialogues above, Shōya sounds bashful when he says the word friend while thinking about the meaning of it. In the past, he was betrayed by the people that he called friends during elementary and middle school. As he goes through high school, Shōya became introverted and forgot what it is like to have friends. Thus, he asks this to Nagatsuka because Shōya feels that he has no liberty to be friends with anyone due to his actions in the past.

Depression

Shōya develops depression to the point he intends to commit suicide after he finished paying his debt to his mother. As Shōya's mom finds out about it, she asks him why he would do so and Shōya tries to give a vague answer regarding his action. This could be seen through the dialogue below:

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Shōya  : What are you grinning about?

Miyako : Well, you know… You've been working hard at your job, right? You sold your
         comics, your clothes, and even you're bedding. But I appreciate it so much.
         By the way, Sho. Why did you want to kill yourself?

Shōya  : Well, you know. There's just… all this stuff.
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(Yamada, 2016, 00:27:01 – 00:27:33)

Based on the dialogue above, Shōya sounds unsure of how he explains all the things that he's been through to his mom. As there are a lot of things that are complex to talk about until he summed it up in one word. He is depressed enough that continuing living itself is hard for him because Shōya thinks there is no way to recover from this state.

Social Anxiety

Shōya has social anxiety where he would feel overwhelmed as the stares of many people directed at him in school. He once admits this to Shōko and Nagatsuka during his high school festival near the end of the film. This could be seen through the dialogue below:

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Shōya         : I never told you before, but I don't fit in at school.

Shōko         : *inaudible [sign language]

Shōya         : I can't see other people's faces. So, it's easier if I just look at
the floor.
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(Yamada, 2016, 02:00:17 – 02:00:31)

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Shōya        : [breaths heavily]

Nagatsuka    : Ya-sho? [knock on door]

Shōya        : Nagatsuka?

Nagatsuka    : Ya-sho, does your stomach hurt? Ya-sho! *opens the bathroom door

Shōya        : Hey, Nagatsuka. Morning. How are you? About before…

Nagatsuka    : Ya-sho, why are you looking down?

Shōya        : Oh? That's weird… I was planning to meet your eyes properly, but...
I guess I got scared.

(Yamada, 2016, 02:01:14 – 02:21:46)
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Based on the two dialogues above, Shōya sounds unable to look at the face of other people properly except Shōko. He got anxious when Nagatsuka opened the bathroom door and immediately looked straight at the floor because he was afraid to face Nagatsuka directly. With a polite greeting, Shōya addressed Nagatsuka as if nothing happened that signifies how nervous he is.

CONCLUSION

As reported on the analysis before, the researcher is able to conclude as follows;

Ishida Shōya went through some intense personality changes which makes him a different person compared to his past life due to the bullying (*ijime*) he experienced. He has changed into a new person which has the characteristic such as:

Introvert as a result of labeling

Ishida Shōya has changed himself after Shimada labeled him as a bully in middle school. He used to be an extrovert person who would effortlessly play and bond over with his two best friends every day at school and after. However, Shimada's rumor and open rejection made Shōya shut himself from the outside world aside from his immediate family.

Depressed as a result of scapegoating

Ishida Shōya has changed himself after he became an easy scapegoat in dealing with Shōko's bullying. He used to be a playful person who played pranks with living things or other kids and always searched for something that interested him. However, his own homeroom teacher easily pins the blame on him and it makes him think that everything is all his fault.

Social anxiety as a result of ostracizing

Ishida Shōya has changed himself after he has been ostracized throughout middle school. He used to be confident to the degree of being overconfident because no one would reprimand his action to Shōko until it b.ecame a problem for the school. However, Shimada's open rejection in middle school made him afraid to look directly at another person's gaze.

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