

## **Bullying Substance in Young Adult Literature**

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### **Abstract**

*Young-adult fiction portrays teens and the situations and social issues that keep these teens isolated. Though quite small, they behave like the adults; internally they possess immaturity of a child but externally they act like adults which create certain confusions in their lives. In the present scenario bullying is seen as an increasing problem for young adults that make to suffer the bully as well as the victim. The victims of bullying experience serious damage to their mental and physical health including depression, anxiety, academic failure and loss of self-control. Young Adult Fiction exposes such crimes and makes the society to analyze it and rescue such victims. The present research has found a truth that bullying problems are frequent among the young adults. While considering the reasons behind the bullying the research states the truth that parental neglect, peer pressure, school atmosphere are much important aspects in the bullying as well to accept bullying. There should be brought positive change. The proper role of parents may enforce the children to lead on the path of success. On the contrary, either the negligence or the excessive expectations may bring the disaster.*

**Key words:** *Young Adult Fiction, Bullying, indirect aggression, relational aggression, social aggression*

Human being exceed through several turns in adolescence. It is a major and significant phase that is the mixture of happiness and grief, tension and worries. Consequently, it gives an experience of a lot of mental agonies, chaos and confusions. They are in search of self-identity. The adolescents are constantly growing and changing, morphing from the condition of childhood to that of adulthood. Today's teens are looking for realism. Though there is place for fantasy and science fiction, they really want to read stories about real teens facing real issues that they themselves can face. Young Adult Fiction is a popular term in the postmodern era that centers its attention on young adults. YALSA's *New Directions For Library Service To Young Adults* defines YA Literature as "a factor promoting positive teenage development" (<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelineswhitepapers/yalit>).

Young Adult Fiction portrays teens and the situations and social issues that keep these teens isolated. Such novels and their contents are sometimes referred as "edgy" that describe the evolution of young adults. It explores various issues that disturb the adolescent psyche. The study of adolescents done in Young Adult Fiction has searched the distinctive feature of adolescents that though quite small, they behave like the adults; internally they possess immaturity of a child but externally they act like an adults which create certain confusions in their lives. Many scholars and writers have shown their interest to study and highlight the focus on the variety of issues of the young adults. Young Adult literature has its own peculiarities. All the novels are told from the viewpoint of adolescents. They are to the centre whereas the adults are off the centre. These works sight the problems but they never remain unsolved. Young Adult books are optimistic and characters make worthy accomplishments. Fictional portrayal of teens, tackling the difficult situations and confronting social issues in Young Adult Fiction help the readers to deal with real-life challenges. Young Adult novels currently in print include content about peer pressure, illness, divorce, drugs, gangs, crime, violence, female/male rape, search of identity, sexuality, depression, suicide, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, familial struggles, friendship, love, race, money, divorce etc. Bullying substance has occupied vast area of Young Adult Fiction. Present research paper is an attempt to evaluate the bullying substance in Young Adult Literature with special reference to Sarah Dessen's novel, *Dreamland*.

Sarah Dessen is the prolific American young adult novelist. She has to her credit thirteen novels that reflect young adult world, their problems and worries and their solutions. She is penned as New York Times Best Seller by the publishers. The select novel for the present research, *Dreamland*, deals with the problem of bullying substance and drug addiction among the young adults. It is an effective picture of a sensitive teenager, sixteen year old Caitlin, disturbed by her sister's elopement that is followed by loss of happiness from the house. In addition to it, when she tries to bring back the happiness of the house by imitating Cass, her sister through cheer leading, she fails to do so. Still she finds that she is not to the centre of attention of her parents. As the reverse effect of it, Caitlin loses her interest in cheer leading then their upswings detestation about the school activities. Consequently she becomes lonely. Unfortunately, her loneliness leads her to such a boy friend who is drug dealer. In the attempt of going away from the society she finds herself easily caught in the net of quirky and hardhearted boyfriend, bully Rogerson who introduces the world of addicts. The novel shows her release from drug addiction and the bullying of boyfriend with the help of love and care of

the family. It was honored with An ALA Best Book for Young Adults, An Amazon.com Editors Choice for 2000, New York Library Book for the Teen Age, 2001.

Bullying in the school has been shown to be a normative experience for children of all ages, cultures, and nationalities. In the present situation bullying is an increasing problem for young adults. According to Veenstra, "... most nations experience bullying rates in 15-25% of their student population." (667). A Psychological Review done by Bradshaw CP, Sawyer AL, O'Brennan LM on *Bullying and peer Victimization at School* shows, "A study in the United States showed that nearly half of students (49%) ranging from elementary to high school age were bullied at least once in the last month, while 23% of students were frequently bullied by their peers" (361).

Bullying involves the relationship between the bully and the victim. Bullying behaviors are a form of instrumental aggression, meaning that bullies act in a proactive manner in order to cause harm to their victim. It is not an exceptional act but it is a repeated act by the bully. The frequent act of bullying against the victim causes the great distress, harm, injury and also humiliation. There is a force and power that reinforces the bully to use his power to trouble the victim and there is the same power which causes the victim to tolerate the bullying by the bully. This power is differentiated according to the physical size and strength, social standing and special knowledge that the bully can use to harm the victim. The select novel for the present research *Dreamland* gives an ample opportunity to observe the adverse effects of bullying and addiction among the young adults. The protagonist of the novel Caitlin is a sixteen years old girl from a middle class family. Caitlin is a neglected child in the house as she is much inferior to her elder sister, Cass. But when Cass runs away from the house no one pays attention towards the poor Caitlin. The house becomes full of sorrow as if there is no existence of other daughter. In such a situation the protagonist Caitlin is trapped by the bully, Rogerson Bisco. Once Rogerson relieves Caitlin from the clutches of some of the guys and achieves appreciation of her. But with time being thankful Caitlin becomes the victim of his aggressive behavior. She becomes no more owner of her own life. Rogerson begins to expect her to be at his service. If she fails to do so he becomes much violent and cruel. For instance, one Friday while consoling her friend Rina for her breakup with her boyfriend, Bill, Caitlin fails to keep the promise to meet Rogerson. Keeping the anger of it Rogerson, gives a sudden punch to Caitlin. This punch is as shocking to readers as it is to Caitlin. Campbell Patty words this sudden punch in his work *Dreamland A Reader's Companion* as Dessen, "... doesn't telegraph Rogerson's ultimate abuse. Reader's will be blindsided by the first punch as Caitlin is" (83). This becomes the routine action of Rogerson.

Rogerson's bullying reaches to such a height that he doesn't spare a place which she can hide to bit. Within some days only her body fills with black yellow bruises which she always tries her level best to cover. Caitlin reports in *Dreamland*, "Rogerson had taken to only hitting me where I could cover it: arms, legs, shoulders, I only wore long-sleeved shirts, big sweaters, and turtlenecks, but at least now my face was off-limits" (164). Actually, Caitlin has indifferent nature. She dislikes wearing absurd clothes; lives away from boyfriends; gets disgust of Cass's romantic behavior and wishes to live away from all these things. Surprisingly, such girl easily comes in the trap of a wicked drug dealer, Rogerson Bisco who brings her complete downfall. The prime purpose of Sarah Dessen's writing is to make Young Adults wise and alert. The adolescence is such a delicate phase that one can be easily trapped by simple sentiments. One has to be cautious for the same. Dessen makes aware to all the adolescents through Cass in *Dreamland*, "The world is speaking to you every day. You just don't always know how to listen." (46) Caitlin can't listen properly the mind of Rogerson and spoils her life.

The bullying behaviors among young adults have various colors like indirect aggression, relational aggression and social aggression. Among them the relational and social aggression are different from each other. In relational aggression the bully uses his relationship with the victim to cause harm to the victim. The bully threatens the victim to affect the victim's relationship either with the bully or with the peers to fulfill his desires. It can be direct or indirect bullying. Sometimes it is direct aggression and sometimes it is indirect aggression. Direct aggression includes those behaviors that a bully commits in the presence of his or her target, resulting in the target becoming immediately aware of being harmed; and indirect aggression, on the other hand, is done without the victim's immediate knowledge and the bully's primary intent is to cause harm to the victim by affecting the victim's social standing or peer relationships. The select novel *Dreamland* has almost all the layers of bullying. Rogerson also applies direct and physical aggression. Caitlin becomes his private property. Once Matthew, the photography trainer just wishes her Merry Christmas by shaking her hand. Rogerson can't bear this sight and mercilessly beats her in front of her house.

In social aggression, the bully instead of affecting the individual relationships causes harm to victim's social status. It is generally indirect aggression. The select novel for the present study shows this layer of bullying. While Physical and direct aggression causes Caitlin physical and mental injury Rogerson's bullying also prove to be the indirect aggression to bring the ruin of social image of Caitlin. Now Caitlin is very rapidly marching towards her downfall. Once Rogerson traps Caitlin, she becomes the victim of his aggressive

behavior. She becomes no more owner of her own life. He begins to expect her to be at his service. Even in it she loses her virginity and becomes the slave of Rogerson. If she fails to follow the orders of him, he becomes much violent and cruel. Now she is just a puppet whose control is at Rogerson. Only Rogerson can activate her. She displays her downfall through her missing the lectures, speaking lies with parents and friends; cutting contacts and even communications with everyone as it is disliked by Rogerson and spending time in only smoking and having drug. Whenever she feels nervous, she goes to Corinna, girl friend of Rogerson's friend, to have drug and smoking the cigarettes. Thus, bullying spoils social dignity of Caitlin. She begins to miss the school, the cheerleading sessions. Dessen presents her frustration in the novel *Dreamland* in the following words: "I was running from one problem or place to another, with no time left to study, or sleep, or just breathe. I felt pulled in all directions fighting to keep all these obligations circling in the air above me. (129) She says, "...now I felt like I was drifting, sucked down by an undertow, and too far out to swim back to the shore (167)." Now she becomes a useless fellow who has failed in all aspects; she is dismissed from the cheerleading, remains very common and light girl "...with a boyfriend who beat her, who smoked too much" (*Dreamland* 180).

While discussing the causes for Rogerson's bullying the study shows that Rogerson himself is the victim of his father's bullying. He is quite brilliant, hardworking, though for wrong doing i.e. providing drug to Perkin's boys. Such a nice guy with possessive nature later becomes too much brutal. Possessive Rogerson actually lacks the self-love and self-confidence and so feels insecure and is afraid of relinquishment and powerlessness. Though he works hard, his father expects more from him. If and when he fails to his expectations, he has to accept his father's bullying. Once he feels insulted as Caitlin herself becomes the sole observer of his father's bullying and the victim, Rogerson feels much humiliated to experience it. Perhaps, his humiliation is much severe than his father's beating. Moreover, he always tolerates the harsh words of his mother. All these aspects become responsible to express bullying act on someone and he finds the victim Caitlin for the same. He needs Caitlin for his happy, safe and secure life. Though he is safe, Caitlin becomes the prey of his brutality that comes through possessive nature. According to Aletheia Luna,

"When left unexplored and unresolved, possessive relationships can amount to feelings of profound unhappiness, anxiety, anger, and even physical or emotional abuse"(https://lonerwolf.com/possessive-boyfriendgirlfriend-partner/#).

Research suggests that victims of bullying experience serious consequences to their mental and physical health including depression, anxiety, academic failure, loss of self-control etc. Victims of bullying have been shown to experience elevated rates of such mental health problems as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and lower levels of self-worth when compared to students who are not bullied (38: 166-180). Caitlin in the select novel, victim of bullying of Rogerson, feels very much lonely. Within few days only she begins to neglect all her activities, relations and friends. Except Rina she keeps contacts with no one. She becomes the friend of herself. As she begins to keep many secrets from everyone she becomes the lonely. She wants to speak her secrets with everyone but she can't. She becomes frustrated. She closes all her contacts with the world. She feels,

I was drifting, sucked down by an under row, and too far out to swim back to the shore. I never even tried to change the station anymore, instead letting his music fill my ears and all the spaces between us, heavy and thick, like a haze” (*Dreamland* 159-167).

Considering the side of Caitlin, the study reveals the very cause why Caitlin bears Rogerson's hitting. The evaluation of bullying throws light on the fact that it is willing surrender of the victim. Whenever she is punched by Rogerson she tells lies to her parents and her friends. She begins to hide her bruises by covering it with long sleeves and long clothes. She hides many things from her parents. She confesses to her mind in the following words:

“I told myself I had too many secrets already: the drugs, cigarettes, my downward cheerleading spiral. If I let one out, the rest would tumble behind it, out of my control, like wild horses let loose to stampede” (*Dreamland* 158).

The adolescent mind feels exhausted to find own blunders instead it goes on finding the excuses. Though she knows own blunders, she is tired of her life and now is not at all trying to come out of it. Caitlin knows the vanity of her relation with Rogerson but she has no courage and strength to separate from him. Through the photographs of Rogerson in soft, smiling mood looking at her she consoles her mind telling these photographs that he is a good guy to whom she has loved. The adolescents prefer to live in illusion more than in reality as it gets feeling of safety in it. There is one more reason behind it. Once while expressing her heart to her sister, Cass through her diary she writes,

“...My boyfriend, Rogerson, hit me tonight. It wasn't the first time. I know you can't believe I'd let this happen: I can't either. But it's more confusing

than you'd think. I love him. /that sounds so weak and pitiful, but lately, it's been enough for me to forgive anything..." (*Dreamland* 161).

In addition to it, once she watches the cruel behavior of Rogerson's father, she feels sympathetic towards Rogerson and consoles her mind that Rogerson's brutality is the reaction of his suffering of the cruel and harsh acts of Rogerson Sr. Then thereafter the cycle of abuse, hitting, coaxing, love and hope continues for several days. Dessen presents this picture so realistically that it becomes the cause of readers' sympathy to Caitlin. Wendy J. Glenn rightly comments on it,

"Although Dessen says that she did no formal research into domestic abuse before writing the novel, she presents realistically the cycle of violence, denial, and hope that Caitlin experiences. When Rogerson hits Caitlin for the first time, neither she nor the readers see it coming" (83).

The study reflects the truth that when something goes beyond the boundaries, it needs great efforts to bring it back. Actually it seems that Caitlin feels it as dreamland in which she prefers to live having no contacts with any human being. Caitlin knows that for Rogerson speaking mean flirting or neglecting Rogerson. She has such a fear of him that she stops keeping contacts with the world. So when one of her male classmates tries to discuss with her about English project she begins to get pains in her stomach. Actually this is the fear of Rogerson's bullying. The study throws light on the truth that too much brilliancy of the children must be properly taken care of. Otherwise the brilliancy may be used for negative force. From the beginning Caitlin comes to know his possessive nature. Whenever he goes out with her even in the school he has always a watch on her; he never tolerates her even going a step ahead. Caitlin misinterprets it as his love. Aletheia Luna says,

"All of their jealousy, all of their paranoia, all of their controlling behavior ... "it's all just love." Your partner justifies his/her toxic behavior by pulling the "love card" on you, thus paving an easy escape route to avoid responsibility and blame. In fact, you might have bought into the "love" excuse yourself, continuing to justify your partner's destructive behavior because you are unconsciously too scared to face reality" (<https://lonerwolf.com/possessive-boyfriend-girlfriend-partner/>).

The bullying substance has severe effects as it involves the bully as well as the victim. The bullying has negative effects in the form of abuse on the mental and physical health of the user including mental disorder, emotional deregulation, and peer rejection. They feel alienated from the world. They fell into depression, become anxious of the situation.

Rogerson, the bully, though looks the villain in the novel; there is a specific reason behind his use of bullying substance i.e. parental bullying. But his act of bullying keeps him lonely with neither the love of his parents nor the company of any friend. The parents are quite strict towards him. Frequently he loses his mental control and loses his temper. Though there is no reason he becomes suspicious and possessive about Caitlin. As a result of it, in the end he is shown as arrested by the police.

The present research depicts the adolescent urge to get the attention of the near and dear ones. The timely attention will save them from catastrophe, whereas the delay will bring their ruin. Caitlin's treatment in Evergreen Care Centre, the rehabilitation Centre for addicts begins with the very motto of this center, WE CAN'T HEAL YOU AT EVERGREEN, BUT WE CAN HELP YOU TO HEAL YOURSELF (*Dreamland* 222). Caitlin finds the sudden change in the people close to her. Suddenly, Dessen displays united attempts of all including Cass to bring her back to normality. Cass's letter gives her self-awareness of the strength. Prior to it, Caitlin used to consider herself as inferior to Cass. Under the burden of her superiority, Caitlin never acknowledges own strengths. But the magic of Cass's letter makes her realize, how her own life is a point of jealousy for Cass as she is not suppressed under the expectations of parents. Moreover Caitlin holds herself guilty for each wrong action. Dr. Marshall makes her aware of how she is not solely responsible for her each wrong deed but there are several others. Concurrently, Dr. Marshall's treatment helps her to heal wounds of her mind. The novel shows several aspects which are very much responsible to bring her downfall such as- her mother was caught up in the grief of Cass's absence; Cass, to whom Caitlin desperately needs, after her marriage, completely abandons Caitlin. By the treatment at Evergreen Care Centre, Caitlin is now duly recognizing the fault of Rogerson, earlier which, she was considering as either her own fault or reaction of his father's cruelty. The negligence of her mother, and Rogerson, who himself is a big rogue; all contribute in the wrong deed of Caitlin. The proper behavior of all these aspects brings Caitlin back to normalcy. Though, still she admits her love for him, she is now well aware of his misdeeds. The study shows one great truth that one should give way out to the feelings rather than suppressing and assuming. Sharing is essential to give free flow to the mind. If Caitlin would have shared her tension, expectations with someone, she would not have passed through this situation. Though during this journey Caitlin is suffered much, this experience sharpens her self-image. Wendy J. Glenn rightly remarks on it,

“Although she has suffered, the experience with him has shaped who she is now. There is no sense in focusing on the “if onlys,” as any change would



mean missing something that came later-her friendship with Corinna, her discovery of photograph, her opportunity to find herself (85).”

Caitlin herself urges the same in the end of the novel. She says, “I needed it all, in the end to make my own story find its finish” (*Dreamland* 242). Young Adult Fiction explores the solution of each Young Adult problem that initiate from family. Caitlin, though, is admitted in the rehabilitation center, she is in reality cured because of the correct understanding by her family. Dr. Marshall removes all the wrong assumptions of Caitlin about her family especially Cass and about her own. Now she realizes how she is important for everyone. But later she realizes how her mother very brilliantly organizes the visitors’ schedule at the center. When she seems to be coming out of the shock at the center, she finds her mother very good person, not someone expecting a lot from the children. Regarding Cass she realizes how she is always under the pressure that her sister is perfect and she is imperfect. But Dr. Marshall proves how this is completely wrong postulation as there are several mistakes committed by Cass like running away without any explanation, keeping the parents and the little sister in tension. Dr. Marshall’s treatment convinces her truth that she is not responsible for what happened. Actually it is the situation that created such crisis. By spending some days in rehabilitation centre with the full support and care and love of family and friends Caitlin becomes normal and strong. Once she comes out of the rehabilitation center she starts her school life normally. During this time, many times she meets Rogerson, who is now duly punished but now she shows no worry, fear and also love for Rogerson. The parental love makes her strong to face any challenges in the life. Now she is leading her life though is tough she finds her parents and her dear people always with her to control and help her. Now she is completely normal, beautiful girl with clear skin and no bruises who can wear short-sleeved T-shirt.

The adolescents are hungry of love. They wish for liberty, at the same time they need the attention of their near and dear ones. They do not tolerate negligence from them as it makes them to feel inferior. It is the assumption of Caitlin that she is inferior to her sister that causes the neglect of parents at her. This inferiority complex still pulls her away from the society where she can live isolated. Moreover parental neglect provokes Caitlin to search someone for whom she is to the centre. Then it may be in brutal possessive form. Her adolescent ego gives her strength enough to tolerate the bullying of Rogerson, as she finds herself as the need of him, someone who is very much important. So she willingly surrenders to his violence. Generally, bully continues his or her violence till its exposure before someone apart from the victim. Once the bullying is revealed before the society, it boomerangs and

comes back on him with full strength. Young Adult Fiction exposes such crimes and makes the society to analyze it and rescue such victims. The present research has searched a truth that bullying problems are frequent among the young adults. It not only traps the victim but also to the bully. While considering the reasons behind the bullying the research states the truth that parental neglect, peer pressure, school atmosphere are much important aspects in the bullying as well to accept bullying. There should be brought positive change. The proper role of parents may enforce the children to lead on the path of success. On the contrary, either the negligence or the excessive expectations may bring the disaster. The parents should perform the role of a mediator and motivator. The article *10 Reasons Teens Abuse Alcohol or Drug* by Promises Treatment Center gives brilliant suggestion to the parents in the following words:

“Talk to your teen. If you’re the parent of a pre-teen or adolescent, talk to him or her today about the dangers of alcohol and drug...Talk to your child from a place of unconditional love, genuine concern, understanding, and heartfelt compassion, recognizing the challenges and temptations that are so insidious and prevalent at that age. Understand just how vulnerable and easily influenced teens are” (<https://www.promises.com/articles/teens/10-reasons-teens-abuse-alcohol-or-drug/>).

The present research article guides the young adult readers as well as adult readers to face the severe challenge of today’s world, bullying substance. It will assist the victims of bullying to come out of the situation; as well as the bully to leave the bullying to lead the happy and normal life.

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