

Can “Bully” make a difference?

Although I saw the controversial new documentary “Bully” last week in Baltimore, I can’t review it until Wednesday. But, as someone who covers youths and young adults for CatholicReview.org, I can tell you that I was left with several questions, including the subject line: Will “Bully” make a difference in our society?

As the title of the film suggests, it’s meant to explore the impact bullying has on our country’s children. Schools all over the country – public, private and Catholic – have some form of bullying happening in classrooms, recess lots, cafeterias, gyms, bleachers, in lines, buses and by the flag pole.

During the last few years, we’ve heard about young people committing suicide or acts of incredible violence toward others because they were bullied. The mental damage was too great and they couldn’t take it anymore. It’s prompted celebrities to speak out in various campaigns to stop bullying.

Watching “Bully,” I was flooded with memories of my own childhood in Hyattsville. I remember several classmates of mine who were verbally picked on by others. There were the kids with lice, that smelled, that were poor, were ‘psycho,’ and the “weirdo” who couldn’t escape scorn.

I was the short kid and while I got teased from time to time, I never felt physically in danger. I handled myself well enough despite always being the kid put at the front of the line.

But, I remember the hurt in the faces of those who were on the end of far more intense taunts.

As we got older, kids at our school got in fights and that led to our principal, Sister of Notre Dame de Namur Joyce Volpini, to start playing “That’s What Friends Are For” over the loud speaker every day until we changed. I’d imagine Elton John,

Stevie Wonder, Dionne Warwick and Gladys Knight are owed some royalties for the amount of times that was played at St. Jerome back in the 1980s. While she was well-intentioned, she was kind of inadvertently training us to despise that song for decades to come. We heard it... a lot.

When you're in elementary school, you think your classmates will be with you forever. You don't realize how, at least in Catholic schools, you'll go your separate ways. You don't think that someone else will spend the rest of their lives hating the mere mention of your name.

Thanks to Facebook, I've been able to connect with many of my classmates. But, there are some that are not there. Thanks to "Bully," I find myself wondering about the "psycho," "weirdo," and the lice kid. The things said to them 20-plus years ago kind of haunt me now. Maybe it's because I was recently married and think about the children my wife and I will have down the road.

Watching "Bully," I was reminded that for all the bullying PSAs and celebrity causes, school hallways and classrooms still have the problems of decades ago. It made me sad. Is this what awaits my children?

I'm now back to the start of this blog. Will bullies, the ones who should be changing, see it? Will parents? Will this movie simply be preaching to the concerned choir?

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