

Bully

reviewed by [Steve A. Vineberg](#) in the [May 30, 2012](#) issue

Lee Hirsch's documentary *Bully* rings false from beginning to end. The film wants to sound alarm bells about the prevalence of bullying in public schools, which is certainly a very real problem. But like the recently completed trilogy of TV documentaries about the child murders at Robin Hood Hills and the young men who were evidently scapegoated for the crime, the movie has a tawdry, voyeuristic quality that keeps distracting you from its alleged agenda.

There are other reasons to question Hirsch's integrity. The cases he follows are reported in such a haphazard, inconclusive way—especially the one involving a girl who, apparently out of frustration with the way she's been treated by her classmates, terrorizes them on a school bus with her mother's gun—that you don't know what to make of them, and you certainly don't trust his reductive perspective.

Hirsch is even worse as a filmmaker. He has no sense of rhythm, and he doesn't seem to understand the value of varying the tone—so the children's stories come across as an unending parade of misery. It's hard to think of another documentary that contains so many close-ups of people crying: Hirsch must think that tears are evidence of authenticity. *Bully* is about as persuasive as a reality TV show, and given its subject matter it's considerably more offensive.