

**DEFINING CYBERBULLYING AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM: A LOOK AT THE  
CANADIAN MAINSTREAM MEDIA**

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**Abstract**

Despite extensive studies on cyberbullying over the past 20 years, the definition, causes, and potential solutions for this matter are still under discussion. In my research, I conducted a qualitative analysis of 183 Canadian news articles from 2003 to 2021. I intended to investigate how the phenomenon of cyberbullying has been depicted in Canadian news articles over the past 20 years. Three main themes emerged from the data. First, the construction of cyberbullying changes depending on the different actors that are involved in the discussions. Second, the cause of cyberbullying tends to be viewed as a lack of moral standards, which attributes the responsibilities of cyberbullying to individuals, especially parents, schools, bullies and the victims. Furthermore, the debate on whether to create a cyberbullying law highlights the irreconcilable tension between social control and freedom of expression, which indirectly hints at the importance of individual responsibility in dealing with cyberbullying.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Amanda Todd, a 15-year-old teenager, died from suicide on October 10, 2012, after experiencing what has been described as sexual extortion, harassment, stalking and cyberbullying. Todd's suicide raised worldwide attention, and resulted in the arrest and conviction of a Dutch named Aydin Coban who lured Todd to expose her breasts on the webcam and later blackmailed her (Butts, 2024). While Aydin Coban has been serving his sentence in Dutch jail (Corder, 2023), it should be reminded that the cyberbullying experienced by Todd involved more than Aydin Coban. After her topless picture went public on social media, Todd was mocked and shunned by her schoolmates, being called a "porn star", "camwhore" and "psycho" (Butts, 2024). What's more, she had at least two attempted suicides before her final death, and some people commented on her Facebook page saying that she should try harder and hope she would die next time (Patchin, 2012). The tragedy of this teenage girl reflects how powerful cyberbullying can be, and how something being posted online can hardly be taken back. As Amanda Todd once said, "It's out there forever... [I] Cried every night, lost all my friends and respect people had for me... again. Then nobody liked me... name calling, judged" (Butts, 2024, para 8).

The topic of cyberbullying has drawn enormous public attention and fostered debates over the last two decades. Especially with the advancement of communication technologies, more and more people use social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Skype. According to the article "Scrolling through the social media stats" (2024) published in Statistics Canada, social media has become part of our everyday life. Social media use is widespread among people of all ages. Specifically, in 2018, about 78% of Canadian Internet users reported

regularly using social media during the past three months. Similarly, “Canada Social Media Statistics 2024” (n.d.) indicated that there are about 36.23 million Internet users and 33.10 million social media users in Canada. With more and more people involve in the online world, individuals’ frequency of cyberbullying experiences and incidents of cyberbullying may also increase. According to “Cyberbullying among youth in Canada” (2023) published in Statistics Canada, 1 in 4 (25%) youth aged 12 to 17 reported being cyberbullied in the previous year. Cyberbullying has caused harm to people, such as losing jobs, being commented by others, being anxious or depressed, losing their normal lives and even committing suicides. Therefore, my study aims to find solutions of cyberbullying and protect people from online violence.

However, questions about how to deal with cyberbullying are not easy to answer, because they are part of an ongoing debate surrounding the definitions, causes, and solutions of cyberbullying (see Barlett, 2017; Peter & Petermann, 2018; Ansary, 2020; Santre, 2023). Notably, the lack of a unified definition complicates research on cyberbullying. In order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of cyberbullying, my research will explore how cyberbullying has been constructed as a social problem in Canadian mainstream media. More specifically, I will be looking at the information or messages pertaining to cyberbullying that have been delivered to the public, directly or indirectly, by Canadian news media, and how that might influence how we, as a society, perceive different types of solutions to address what is now seen as a social problem.

I have three theoretical objectives. First, I wish to better understand how various actors given voices in the media have defined cyberbullying as a social problem. Second, I want to identify the types of solutions that are advocated for in mainstream media in order to trace

similarities and differences between groups of actors. Finally, I hope to better define the complex meaning of cyberbullying as it is being framed, in the media, for broader audiences. To achieve this goal, I will conduct a thematic analysis of 183 Canadian online news articles, which were published across 40 Canadian newspapers. By using thematic analysis, I will identify the main actors whose perspectives were presented in the collected news articles and how these actors portray cyberbullying as a social issue. I will also examine the solutions that these collected Canadian news articles suggest for cyberbullying, and analyze how news articles attribute the responsibility of dealing with cyberbullying to different actors.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

In this chapter, I review studies on cyberbullying in Canada and similar contexts. I discuss the issue of defining cyberbullying, its prevalence, the impact of cyberbullying on individuals and societies, and the debates surrounding how to address this issue .

### **2.1 General review of research on cyberbullying in Canada**

The concept of cyberbullying has its roots in a New York Times article in 1995 (O’Neill, 1995, as cited in Bauman, 2011). Then, in 2003, Bill Belsey, the creator of a cyberbullying website at <http://www.cyberbullying.ca>, first defined and used this term (Bauman, 2011). However, the surge in research and public interest in this topic is often linked to the media coverage of several high-profile suicide cases related to cyberbullying. For example, in Canada, cyberbullying gained significant public attention and entered the policy agenda in 2012 as a result of the suicides of Amanda Todd, Rehtaeh Parsons, and Todd Loik (Deschamps & McNutt, 2016; Riddell, Pepler & Craig, 2018). Similarly in the UK, cyberbullying became a subject of widespread concern and discussion following news reports of several teen suicides allegedly caused by cyberbullying (Gaffney & Farrington, 2018). Also in the U.S., the suicide of a teenage girl, Megan Meir, led to government actions in criminalizing cyberbullying (Cartwright, 2017). Simply speaking, Cyberbullying has become a major concern for many researchers and the general public.

However, despite the wealth of knowledge provided by studies on the topic, no clear consensus has emerged and much seemingly remains unclear and cause for arguments regarding cyberbullying, including its definition, impact, and appropriate methods to deal with it. The sustained and rapid expansion of research on cyberbullying does highlight the

issue's recognition among scholars, and a possible appetite for expertise in light of public debates surrounding it. With nearly two decades of research and extensive discussions between researchers, policymakers, lawmakers, educators, and the public, cyberbullying has been extensively studied from numerous angles, such as defining the issue, legal responses, the nature and impact of cyberbullying, prevalence, possible causes, connections with traditional bullying, interventions, and public opinions (e. g. Betts, 2016; Cartwright, 2017; Ansary, 2020; Zylch, Ortega-Ruiz & del Rey, 2015; Coburn, Connolly & Roesch, 2015; Cassidy, Brown & Jackson, 2012; Faucher, Cassidy & Jackson, 2020).

## **2.2 Definition**

During the literature review, it was almost impossible to find an article on cyberbullying that did not mention traditional bullying. Many researchers regard cyberbullying as a new form of bullying, which emerged due to the development of technology (e.g., Betts, 2016; Tokunaga, 2010; Cross, Lester & Barnes, 2015; Hurley, 2004; El Asam & Samara, 2016; Donegan, 2012; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). Olweus ( 2013, as cited in Betts, 2016) described cyberbullying as bullying via electronic devices. Hurley (2004, p. 1) even used “Bullies + technology = cyberbullying” as the title of his article. Schenk and Fremouw (2012) also described cyberbullying as online bullying. In other words, cyberbullying is mostly viewed as bullying with the assistance of Internet technologies. Many argue that this aspect, which makes cyberbullying somewhat unique, should not be neglected.

On the other hand, many argue that there are significant differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying (e.g., Baldry, Farrington, Sorrentino & Blaya, 2018; Ansary, 2020). As Ansary (2020) cautioned that the subtle difference between traditional

bullying and cyberbullying cannot be ignored. Specifically, cyberbullying has its unique features, such as anonymity, which can encourage individuals to do things they would not do in the real world and creates a sense of insecurity to victims (Baldry, Farrington, Sorrentino & Blaya, 2018). Similarly, in the study of cyberbullying in youth, Vaillancourt, Faris and Mishna (2017) indicated that anonymity enables bullies to “go unchecked” (p. 368). Donegan (2012, p. 34) also discussed how technologies provide bullies with the ability to cover their identities, making it difficult for the targets of their bullying to defend.

In addition to anonymity, Baldry, Farrington, Sorrentino & Blaya (2018) also highlighted cyberbullying’s power to spread information widely and quickly. For example, a message could be shared by an unlimited number of audiences. Hurley (2004) also indicated that the ubiquitous nature of cyberbullying makes it so that victims cannot escape from cyberbullying. Similarly, Vaillancourt, Faris and Mishna’s (2017, p. 368) study on the effects of cyberbullying on youth emphasized the “pervasive, never-ending nature of cyberbullying and the ability to quickly reach large audiences.” Simply speaking, cyberbullying has its own unique features that distinguish it from traditional bullying.

In addition to viewing cyberbullying as a form of traditional bullying, many researchers attempted to create a specific definition for cyberbullying. However, defining cyberbullying has long been a debate among researchers, and to date, there still has been no universal agreement on what constitutes cyberbullying (Betts, 2016; Van Hee et al., 2018; Ansary, 2020). A recent study by Peter and Petermann (2018) analysed 24 definitions of cyberbullying, revealing a lack of consensus on the definition. The definitions varied in specific attributes, including aggression, repetition, intent, power imbalances, direct or indirect targeting of the

victim, the number of victims, and the inclusion of "harass" and "embarrass". Similarly, in Baldry, Farrington, Sorrentino, and Blaya (2018)'s study on the definition, nature and prevalence of cyberbullying, the authors argued that there is an inconsistency regarding the concepts and criteria of cyberbullying. What's more, "very few cross-national or cross-cultural research studies have been conducted using the same measurement tools and methods" (Baldry, Farrington, Sorrentino & Blaya, 2018, pp. 5-6). As a case in point, the following different definitions are some that have been used by researchers:

- "Willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text" (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, p. 152).
- "An aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" (Smith et al., 2008, p. 376).
- "Any behaviour performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others" (Tokunaga, 2010, p. 278).
- "Repeated unwanted, hurtful, harassing, and/or threatening interaction through electronic communication media" (Rafferty & Vander Ven, 2014, p. 364).

The variety or inconsistency in definitions posts a great challenge in conducting comparative studies (Baldry, Farrington, Sorrentino & Blaya, 2018). And this is something that needs to be addressed before researchers can search for a real solution to this problem. After all, how can a problem be solved if the definition of the problem itself is still in question.

Specific to the criteria for cyberbullying, the most discussed attributes of traditional

bullying include repetition, intent, and an imbalance of power. Bullying behavior must comprise these three elements: (1) a deliberate intention to harm the victim; (2) repeated instances of bullying; (3) a power imbalance between the bully and the victim (Olweus, 1993, cited in Campbell & Bauman, 2018). Due to the distinctions between bullying and cyberbullying, some researchers have scrutinized the relevance of traditional bullying to cyberbullying (Van Hee et al., 2018; Betts, 2016; Ansary, 2020; Tokunaga, 2010). Indeed, when applied to cyberbullying, these three elements used in traditional bullying become more complicated.

Firstly, the meaning of "repetition" in cyberbullying requires clarification. According to some researchers, posting a picture or comment online can have "repetition" effects if it is viewed or shared by other online users or if it results in the victim being bullied offline. Even if the original message is deleted, the victim could still be victimized repeatedly, as the content may already be widely disseminated (Van Hee et al., 2018; Peter & Petermann, 2018; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Thus, it is imperative to clarify the definition of repetition in the context of cyberbullying, as it impacts what constitutes cyberbullying.

Like repetition, it is challenging to ascertain the intention of online behavior. Different individuals perceive and interpret information differently. The sender's intended message can be interpreted differently by the message recipient (Betts, 2016, p. 47; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Additionally, the intent of an online action can become out of control when a large number of online users interpret it, as a single act may be repeated by unlimited audiences (Deschamps & McNutt, 2016).

Moreover, the definition of power imbalance in cyberbullying remains unclear.

Nonetheless, several scholars have suggested that the Internet's distinctive features inherently create an imbalance of power (Betts, 2016; Ansary, 2020). The anonymity provided by cyberspace allows bullies to target victims without being detected, causing them to feel less constrained by the rules of the real world. It makes the victims powerless and helpless (Bauman, 2011; Betts, 2016; Ansary, 2020; Deschamps & McNutt, 2016; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Using the Internet to target others implies a power imbalance, regardless of whether the definition of cyberbullying includes the characteristic of an imbalance of power.

Again, generally speaking, existing studies show that there is no consensus regarding the definition of cyberbullying. Methodologically, discrepancies among definitions and operationalization of the phenomenon can also cause inconsistent measurements of cyberbullying, weakening the generalizability, reliability, and validity of research and influencing the investigation of cyberbullying prevalence rates. In turn, this can lead to issues when comparing or evaluating the efficacy of programs to prevent cyberbullying (Ansary, 2020; Tokunaga, 2010). Indeed, the measured prevalence of cyberbullying varies considerably across studies due to inconsistencies in its definition (Ansary, 2020; Tokunaga, 2010) and underreporting (Cartwright, 2017). Several studies have reported varying prevalence rates (Cartwright, 2017; Van Hee et al, 2018; Zylch, Ortega-Ruiz & del Rey, 2015; Tokunaga, 2010; Vaillancourt et al, 2017). As Ansary (2020) questioned, how could there be effective interventions on cyberbullying if the definition of the problem itself is changing?

However, despite the variation in statistics, cyberbullying has been viewed as a growing problem in Canada. As Cartwright (2017) indicated, cyberbullying continues to rise due to the increase in Internet use. Similarly, Canadian Public Affairs' president, Mike Colledge,

expressed concern about cyberbullying, stating that "the worrisome thing is that we started in 2011 to track [instances], and the numbers haven't moved down" (Abedi, 2018, para 6-7).

Simply speaking, cyberbullying continues to be viewed as a serious public issue that needs to be addressed.

### **2.3 Impacts of cyberbullying**

As a possible matter of public interest, research on cyberbullying was spurred by several high-profile suicide incidents. However, various studies on this topic indicate that there is actually little evidence on a relationship between cyberbullying and suicide (Cartwright, 2017; Sabella, Patchin, Hinduja, 2013, Betts, 2016). Moreover, both Cartwright (2017) and Betts (2016) cautioned about the attempt to establish a causal relationship between bullying and cyberbullying, as many other factors could influence this relationship. That being said, studies do suggest that cyberbullying causes negative impacts on victims' mental health, social reputation, and academic performances (e.g., Ansary, 2020; Cross, Lester & Barnes, 2015; Sabella, Patchin & Hinduja, 2013; Smith, 2016; Gaffney, Farrington, Espelage, Ttofi, 2019; Betts, 2016). In Nikolaou (2017)'s investigation of the 1991–2015 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey (YRBS), the researcher found that there has been a strong association between cyberbullying and individuals' suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Cross, Lester and Barnes (2015) suggested that cyberbullying can seriously affect young people's social, psychological, and academic wellbeing. Sabella, Patchin and Hinduja (2013, p. 2705) also pointed out that "cyberbullying may aggravate the victim's already existing vulnerabilities." Similarly, Betts (2016) stated that there is a negative association between cyberbullying and individuals' mental health problems (such as depression), self-esteem and

social relationships.

Furthermore, cyberbullying reflects the risks of Internet use by adolescents. In Machimbarrena et al (2018)'s study of the comorbidity between Internet risks (cyberbullying, cyber dating abuse, sexting and online grooming), the authors found that cyberbullying is the single most prevailing risk for adolescents in 22 Spanish schools. In Chadwick (2014)'s book about the impacts of cyberbullying, the author pointed out the association between young people's use of social media and problems such as cyberbullying, privacy issues, and sexting. Similarly, Furnell (2020) discussed the exploitation of online information through cyberbullying. With the benefits the information technology systems and networks bring, knowingly or unknowingly, individuals are giving away their information online, which leads to individual information (e.g., information indicating identity, contact information, and financial information) being increasingly exposed and exploited on the Internet (Furnell, 2020). In Vandebosch and Cleemput's (2008) study of the experiences and opinions of students (aging from 10 to 18) on cyberbullying, participants revealed their experiences of personal conversations and pictures being sent to others (Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2008). Also, in Bryce and Klang's (2009) study on young people's disclosure of personal information and its association with cyberbullying, their findings indicated disclosing personal information (such as sharing information with friends and other online users) can potentially aid cyberbullying. All these issues suggest that cyberbullying not only affects individuals' well-being, but also poses various dangers in youth's daily online activities. The risks associated with cyberbullying mirror the problems emerged in the whole online world. It sends individuals a message that there are actual consequences for online activities. Therefore,

both for cyberbullies and the victims, there is a need to recognize the impacts of cyberbullying, and realize that all the risks and harm associated with cyberbullying are real. Being online does not make individuals free from harm and responsibilities.

## **2.4 Intervention**

One of the biggest challenges with cyberbullying research is that there are no clear solutions. Despite the large scale of studies conducted to explore ways to prevent and intervene in cyberbullying, no consistent and empirical findings have established any effective interventions. In other words, after 20 years study on cyberbullying, researchers are still at the stage of searching for effective methods to deal with it. In the following sections, I will discuss existing interventions on cyberbullying and analyze the challenges of employing each intervention.

### **2.4.1. Legal responses**

Due to the media's portrayal of the severity and prevalence of cyberbullying, laws and policies have often been required in response to it (Felt, 2017; Deschamps & McNutt, 2016). There has long been a debate on whether current laws are adequate, whether specific cyberbullying laws should be created, and whether it is proper at all to deal with cyberbullying through laws. However, it remains to be a question as to how to prevent cyberbullying through legislation. As Sallavaci (2018) mentioned in the book *Cyber Criminology*, tackling online problematic speech through legislation is complicated. “There is a need to consider whether it is capable of dealing with offensive internet communications effectively and whether there is scope for simplifying the law in this difficult area” (Sallavaci, 2018, p. 15).

Specific to Canada, there has been no specific offence named “cyberbullying”.

However, several existing laws can be used to deal with cyberbullying. On the federal level, there are both criminal law and civil law which could be applied to cyberbullying. Under the civil law, a cyberbully may be charged for defamation. A cyberbully, a school or a workplace may be accused for “creating an unsafe environment for students or employees”. A person can also be accountable for “any consequences that he or she might reasonably have guessed would happen” (“Legal Consequences of Cyberbullying”, n.d.).

Under criminal law, there is *Criminal code* (sections such as sharing intimate images without consent, criminal harassment, uttering threats, intimidation, unauthorized use of computer, identity theft, false messages, indecent or harassing telephone calls, counselling suicide, defamatory libel, public incitement of hatred, offence against the person and reputation) (Public Safety Canada, 2021, para. 3). Furthermore, there is also *the Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act*, which creates "a new offence of non-consensual distribution of intimate images" under the Criminal Code (Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act, 2014, para. a).

At the provincial level, several provinces have specific laws for cyberbullying. For example, in Ontario, the Education Act defines both bullying and cyberbullying, and lays down requirements for schools to prevent cyberbullying. Similarly, in Alberta, Quebec, the Northwest territories and New Brunswick, there are also Education Act requiring schools to take preventive actions in situations of bullying and cyberbullying. Also, Manitoba enacted a bill in 2013 which could hold parents responsible for their children’s cyberbullying behaviors (“Legal Consequences of Cyberbullying”, n.d.). Moreover, in Nova Scotia, there is *Bill 27*,

*The Intimate images and Cyber-protection Act* (it was enacted in Nova Scotia after the Cyber-Safety Act being struck down in 2015) (McDonald, 2018), which aims to protect Nova Scotians' non-consensual sharing of intimate images and cyber-bullying (Nova Scotia Legislature, 2017).

Simply speaking, at the federal level, there is no specific cyberbullying law. Instead, dealing with cyberbullying relies on the application of existing laws. In terms of the provincial level, only several provinces have their own laws targeting cyberbullying and bullying, and the purpose of each provincial law is different.

Due to the limitations of the above existing laws, many researchers indicate that they are inadequate in dealing with specific cyberbullying problems (King, 2010; Coburn, Connolly & Roesch, 2015; Mitchell, 2012; Cartwright, 2017). This inadequacy is connected to several reasons. First of all, while criminal laws could be applied to cases of cyberbullying, it is difficult and sometimes inappropriate for victims to employ these laws to criminalize cyberbullying behavior (Betts, 2016; Cartwright, 2017; Davis, 2015). An example of criminal harassment can be the *R. v. Elliott* case. In this case, the complaints claimed that the accused, Mr. Elliott, kept sending them tweets when they clearly indicated they did not want to receive any messages from him (*R. v. Elliott*, 2016). All charges were finally dismissed on the grounds that "the fear be reasonable in all of the circumstances has not been established beyond a reasonable doubt" (*R. v. Elliott*, 2016, p. 50, para. 5). This case demonstrates how difficult it is to establish harm when the interactions between two individuals are mere communication.

Another issue with legislation against cyberbullying is that there have been no specific

cyberbullying laws created at the federal level. As shown above, the *Cyber-Safety Act* and Bill 27 were created under the province of Nova Scotia. Similarly, *Bill 154, Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day Act* was enacted to raise cyberbullying awareness specifically in Ontario, and has been in effect since 2021 (Clarke, 2020). These province-specific laws pose a challenge for governments and policymakers to regulate cyberbullying on a national level. In terms of provincial and territorial legislation, the Cybercrime Working Group recommended that "all levels of government continue to build on their initiatives to address the issue of cyberbullying in a comprehensive manner" (Government of Canada, 2017, Recommendation 1). In other words, the ultimate goal of building legislation at all levels of government is that these initiatives could eventually be integrated together.

Furthermore, creating legislation for cyberbullying sometimes raises concerns about the expansion of government's power and the intrusion of individuals' rights. Specifically, the passing of *the Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act (PCOCA)* spurred public debates on the criminalization of cyberbullying. As Cohen (2014) mentioned, this bill has exceeded the targeting of cyberbullying and touched the problem of Internet surveillance. Also, in an article called *privacy could vanish if cyber-bullying act became law*, PEN Canada argued that *the Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act (BillC-13)* makes it lawful for big companies to reveal citizens' information to the government. And it invades individuals' right to privacy under section 8 of the Canadian charter, and this right also ties to individuals' right to freedom of expression under section 2 of the Canadian Charter ("Privacy could vanish", 2014).

In Coburn, Connolly and Roesch (2015)'s view, most of the *PCOCA* is not about

cyberbullying and it offers little support to the victims. As Bailey (2014) pointed out, cyberbullying has become more of a political issue containing different ideologies and other issues than a real problem. In other words, the process of legislating against cyberbullying may be complicated by other political and ideological factors. Specifically, the criminalization of cyberbullying often stimulates debates between individual rights and the importance of preventing cyberbullying.

Specific to the problem concerning individual rights, freedom of expression has been the most discussed topic in the controversies of criminalizing cyberbullying. The reason that freedom of speech is involved in this discourse ties back to the definitional problem of cyberbullying. As some researchers indicated, the term "cyberbullying" is an umbrella term that covers a wide range of conduct, such as gossiping or insulting messages. It is difficult to determine the extent of harm an action inflicted given that the impacts of it can also range from annoying to severe (Tokunaga, 2010; Davis, 2015; Cartwright, 2017; Sabella, Patchin & Hinduja, 2013). Also, as mentioned earlier, different individuals could perceive an action or message differently. One person might feel a comment is only a joke, but another person might take it seriously. As Cartwright (2017) mentioned, many forms of cyberbullying cannot be viewed as criminal, and legislating against all forms of cyberbullying will end up encroaching on freedom of expression. Similarly, Meredith (2010) indicated that legislating against cyberbullying sometimes inevitably criminalizes lawful behaviors and causes unintentional negative consequences, such as depriving individuals' rights to proper online speech. Furthermore, in Hudson (2016)'s article *Is Cyberbullying Free Speech?*, a professor, Patchin, at the school of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida Atlantic University,

emphasized that there is a line between appropriate and inappropriate online speech, but the problem is this line has not been clearly defined. Simply speaking, there is a need to protect individuals' rights to free speech when dealing with cyberbullying. However, it remains to be a challenge as to how to define the line between legal and illegal online speech.

While many discussed the problems associated with creating cyberbullying laws, some researchers argued that there is no need to create new laws against cyberbullying. In Broll and Huey's (2015) study of Canadian police officers' perspectives on cyberbullying, the findings suggest that current laws are adequate in dealing with cyberbullying. Specifically, there is a line between legal and illegal conduct, and police officers know when this line is crossed, which is when existing laws will be used. Furthermore, police officers emphasized that cyberbullying should be treated through a preventative approach, such as education. In other words, these police officers are suggesting that existing laws could recognize cyberbullying behaviors that are criminal, and the rest of legal cyberbullying behaviors should be treated through education. Similarly, Cartwright (2017) argued that cyberbullying should be regarded as a moral problem rather than a legal one and it can be better dealt with through the development of a better Internet environment. In other words, these researchers did not focus on using legislation to protect individuals from cyberbullying, instead, they encourage alternative approaches. In the following sections, some main alternative approaches will be discussed.

#### **2.4.2. Intervention at the whole community level**

Rather than depending on laws to address cyberbullying, many researchers call for actions from the whole community - schools, parents, and other social prevention programs.

For example, after examining various pieces of legislation passed across Canada, Mitchell (2012) concluded that laws cannot stop cyberbullying, and the issue of cyberbullying can only be addressed with the involvement of the whole community.

Many studies indicate that schools and teachers could play a significant role in helping students deal with cyberbullying (e.g., Cassidy, Brown & Jackson, 2012; Broll & Huey, 2015; Mitchell, 2012; Steeves, 2014; Kowalski, Limber & McCord, 2019). According to Cassidy, Brown, and Jackson (2012), educators play a crucial role in promoting positive online behaviors and inhibiting cyberbullying conduct. In a study of cyberbullying risk and protective factors, Kowalski et al (2019) found that the school climate is an essential factor. Students' perception of safety at school and their commitment to school are linked to students' likelihood of committing cyberbullying. In Faucher, Cassidy and Jackson's (2020) study of post-secondary students' opinions on solutions to cyberbullying, a majority of students emphasized the responsibility of schools. They indicated that universities' efforts in education and creating policies against cyberbullying will foster an anti-cyberbullying culture and discourage problematic online behaviors.

The problem with intervention through school is that the issue of cyberbullying does not seem to raise many concerns among teachers (Cassidy, Brown & Jackson, 2012; Ansary, 2020; Bauman, 2011; Steeves, 2014), especially considering that students are spending most of their time at schools. One reflection of this lack of attention is that it is difficult for students to find information about cyberbullying. Some schools do not include cyberbullying in their anti-bullying policies (Kessel Schneider et al., 2013, as cited in Ansary, 2020). University students also indicate that policies for cyberbullying are not disseminated around, and

students are not informed about how to access these policies (Faucher et al., 2020). Similarly, students are not well informed about school counselor services that might support students in coping with cyberbullying (Bauman, 2011). On the other hand, many teachers do not see cyberbullying as a concerning issue among students, and they fail to offer support for students. As stated by Steeves (2014), teachers are usually the last person a student will seek help from, although teachers usually have many resources related to cyberbullying. This reflects how teachers have situated themselves in an unapproachable position for students. Cassidy et al. (2012) study also indicated that there is a lack of awareness and interest in the influence of cyberbullying on their students. Therefore, to improve school intervention in cyberbullying, there is a need to raise schools' awareness of cyberbullying and offer teachers training to support their students (Ansary, 2020).

Parents' support and guidance in technology use play a significant role in helping children deal with cyberbullying (e.g., Kowalski et al., 2019; Ansary, 2020). In Elsaesser, Russell, Ohannessian, and Patton's (2017) study of parents' influence on young people's cyberbullying experience, results indicated that when there is a supportive and warm relationship between parents and children, parental supervision tends to reduce children's involvement in cyberbullying. According to Foss and Druin (2014), parents could influence and teach children search skills simply by modelling and setting up rules, as they are in the best position to observe their children's search experience and support them when they are struggling. Similarly, Stalans and Finn (2016) emphasized that parents' praise, understanding, and fairness to their children would help youth avoid unlawful online participation. Therefore, children need strong support from their parents or families.

Currently, there are three published studies on cyberbullying program reviews (Ansary, 2020). The first one is Van Cleemput, DeSmet, Vandebosch and Bastiaensens's (2014) systematic review and meta-analysis of 16 cyberbullying prevention programs in European countries, the U.S., Australia and Taiwan. Their findings indicated that "little documentation was available on the evaluation of cyberbullying prevention programs" (p. 35). In addition, in contrast with traditional bullying prevention programs, cyberbullying prevention programs were "minimal, and most often consisted of a curriculum and one additional element (e.g., information for teachers or working with peers)" (Van Cleemput et al., 2014, p. 36). Furthermore, the effectiveness of intervention programs has been lower than in previous years, which might imply that the cyberbullying phenomenon is becoming more complex and more difficult to address (Van Cleemput et al, 2014).

Secondly, Gaffney, Farrington, Espelage and Ttofi (2019) studied the effectiveness of cyberbullying programs (including both unpublished and published from 2000 to 2017). Their review is so far "the first to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programs on cyberbullying perpetration and victimization outcomes" (Gaffney et al, 2019, p. 13). Results indicated that, despite the increased research about cyberbullying, there is a lack of studies on the effectiveness of intervention and prevention programs. Furthermore, although studies on risk factors, outcomes, and impacts of cyberbullying are increasing, there has not yet been any solid evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of intervention and prevention programs in reducing online aggression (Gaffney et al, 2019).

Finally, we found Tanrikulu's (2018) systematic review of seventeen studies of school-based cyberbullying intervention and prevention programs. The unique part of this

review is that the researcher explored the theoretical basis of the intervention and prevention programs. The results revealed that a wide range of theories have been used to build programs. However, details of the theoretical basis of these programs are lacking, which creates a barrier to fully understanding the theoretical backgrounds of these programs (Tanrikulu, 2018). In addition, findings indicated that "a program developed for traditional bullying can be effective on cyberbullying or vice versa" (Tanrikulu, 2018, p. 85). This finding suggests that future prevention and intervention programs can be designed in a way that targets both traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Tanrikulu, 2018).

Overall, there still needs to be more research on the effectiveness of intervention and prevention programs. Based on these three studies, the intervention and prevention programs "demonstrated only modest effects" (Ansary, 2020, p. 5). In other words, current intervention and prevention programs have yet to demonstrate or discover any effective elements for an effective program. In addition, there is a lack of detailed information on the theoretical basis of these intervention and prevention programs. Furthermore, while claiming the programs were designed to address cyberbullying, there have not yet been any details about how participants of these programs think about the effectiveness of these programs.

#### **2.4.3. No need for intervention**

Last but not least, some studies suggest cyberbullying should be dealt with by individuals themselves. In Steeves's (2014) national survey of 5,436 Canadian students in grades 4-11, "many students see meanness as a common form of interaction with little perceived harm" (p. 3), and this online meanness is just part of teen life. Similarly, in Mishna et al.'s (2020) study on the perspectives of parents, students and schools on cyberbullying,

results revealed that cyberbullying has been regarded as a normal and inevitable part of life, and victims of cyberbullying should take responsibility for themselves. These studies reflect how cyberbullying is normalized and sometimes individualized, regarded as a personal problem. Understanding how cyberbullying is being normalized is important because it reflects some deeper problems embedded in society. In Mishna et al.'s (2020) study on parents, teachers and students perceptions on bullying, their findings indicated that the victimization of bullying and cyberbullying are associated with gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, appearance and ability. Bullying and cyberbullying tend to be normalized and being viewed as a inevitable part of growing up, which deepens the issue of inequalities. Similarly, in Bryce and Fraser's study (2013) on the students' (aging from 9 to 19) perspectives on cyberbullying, the results revealed that cyberbullying has been perceived as a routine part of students. As Mishna, Schwan, Birze et al (2020) pointed out that gendered and sexualized bullying reflects social norms and it can be linked to harassment, violence, abuse and discrimination. In other words, the normalization of cyberbullying concealed the more important social issues behind this phenomenon. By analyzing how cyberbullying was normalized, individuals will gain insights into issues associated with social norms, and therefore, find possible solutions for them.

## **2.5 Conclusion and discussion**

Studies on cyberbullying have provided a broad overview of the phenomenon. However, many aspects of the topic remain unclear. There is still no unified definition of cyberbullying, and the link between cyberbullying and suicide needs further investigation. Other factors, such as mental health problems, must also be further researched. In terms of intervention, there is still a lack of evidence on the effectiveness of various interventions. Further studies

could be conducted on the effectiveness of existing laws dealing with cyberbullying.

Meanwhile, more needs to be known about the effectiveness of school-based and online bullying prevention initiatives.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical framework**

In order to gain a better understanding of cyberbullying, I propose to examine how this phenomenon has come to be defined as a particular sort of concern within Canadian society. The theoretical framework that I have developed to make sense of my data is social problem theories and framing theories. I did not start my research with these theoretical tools already decided: I put them together while alternating between inductive and deductive phases of the analytical process, as themes emerged. In this chapter, I will first discuss the concept of social problems theories and the construction of social problems. Following this, I will present work related to framing theory, especially how the role of media in framing the issue of cyberbullying.

#### **3.1 What is a social problem?**

To understand cyberbullying, there is a need to first look at how it has become a social problem. The origin of the term "social problem" can be traced back to the eighteenth century, when several scholars, such as Edmund Burke, James Harris, and Rousseau, began to explore the meaning of "social" and "problem". Later, during the nineteenth century, more scholars, such as John Stuart Mill, M. A. Quetelet, Auguste Comte, Goethe, G.E. Lessing, and Gustave Flaubert, further developed the discussion by trying to link "social" and "problem" together (Schwartz, 1997, pp. 277-278). Around the 1850s, John Stuart Mill first coined the term "social problem" in his work. He wrote, "the social problem of the future we considered to be, how to unite the greatest individual liberty of action with an equal ownership of all in the raw material of the globe and an equal partnership of all in the benefits of combined labor" (Hall, 1965, p. 248, as cited in Schwartz, 1997, p. 278). John Stuart Mill's definition brought up

issues related to individual and collective benefits, and equality. While the meaning was still vague, it did raise some critical points for other scholars' conceptualization of social problems. As Marvasti and Treviño (2019) mentioned, John Stuart Mill's definition emphasized how a problem is framed to enable social changes. The idea that a social problem is framed has been accepted by many scholars, such as Fuller and Myers, Michailakis and Schirmer, Lauer, and Isaacs. To these researchers, a social problem is not something that naturally exists. Rather, the meaning of a social problem is created by individuals (see Fuller & Myers, 1941; Michailakis & Schirmer, 2014; Isaacs, 2021). Therefore, instead of asking whether social problems exist, a more important question would be how or through what process a social problem is constructed. In the case of cyberbullying, understanding the formation of cyberbullying as a social problem will provide us insights into different actors' perspectives on cyberbullying and how it can bring social changes.

Based on previous studies, many researchers have taken the view that social problems consist of both objective and subjective elements (see Fuller & Myers, 1941; Kitsuse and Spector, 1973; Lauer, 1976; Michailakis & Schirmer, 2014; Loseke, 2017). According to Fuller and Myers (1941), a social problem contains both the objective phase and the subjective phase. The objective phase refers to conditions that can be verified—for example, the population data. The density of the population in a specific area is a verifiable condition. On the other hand, a subjective condition occurs when people perceive or define a specific condition as adverse to their best interest. For example, in addition to the population data's verifiable condition, people in this area are aware of the adverse conditions. Awareness of the condition, or the problem by people under the condition, makes up the subjective condition.

As Fuller and Myers (1941) mentioned, "social problems are what people think they are" (p. 25). If we apply this view to the phenomenon of cyberbullying, the existence of cyberbullying as a social problem requires some verifiable conditions. This can be related to the process of defining cyberbullying. While the term cyberbullying has been widely used in society, is it perceived the same way by different members in society?

Like Fuller and Myers, Lauer (1976) also thinks there are subjective and objective conditions. A social problem exists when people subjectively perceive the objective conditions as problematic. However, according to Lauer (1976), the real issue in defining social problems is who should define the subjective conditions. Is it the public affected by the problem, or experts in this area? Lauer (1976) suggested that both the public and the experts have a say in defining a social problem. There is a notion of "the quality of life" which emphasizes the living conditions such as job opportunities, education, health care, and crime rates of a country. And public opinion should be taken into account to ensure the living conditions are the desired quality of life for individuals. On the other hand, the role of sociologists and other experts in defining social problems is to identify the conditions and demonstrate that these conditions are incompatible with individuals' desired quality of life (Lauer, 1976). In other words, instead of analyzing the objective and subjective conditions of a social problem, Lauer (1976) takes a further step to discuss who should define the problem. The suggestion that both the public and experts need to contribute to the definition of a social problem provides a new way to look at and analyze social problems. In the case of cyberbullying, researchers can analyze how the public might view it as against the desired quality of life, and how experts have been listing evidence to demonstrate cyberbullying as an

obstacle for people's desired living conditions.

In addition, Michailakis and Schirmer agreed with these above authors about the objective and subjective conditions in a social problem. According to Michailakis and Schirmer (2014), there are first- and second-order realities. First-order realities are "uninterpreted facts" that can be accessed, measured, and verified. An example would be the temperature (p. 432). On the other hand, second-order reality indicates the interpretations of the first-order reality. It is the meaning people create based on the first-order reality (Michailakis & Schirmer, 2014). In Michailakis and Schirmer's view (2014), social problems are a second-order reality. Therefore, they take the constructionist approach and suggest that claim-makers define social problems and different observers could construct the social problem differently.

It is noteworthy that Michailakis and Schirmer's article not only discussed the objective and subjective conditions of a social problem but also brought up the discussion on the constructionist approach to social problems. There are constructionists such as Holstein, Miller, Loseke, Best, Specter, and Kisuse. From the perspective of constructionism, social problems are subjective definitions created by humans themselves, and "a social problem does not exist until it is defined as such" (Loseke, 2003). Loseke (2003) emphasized that humans create meanings of the world they live in, and there is a need to understand how people create meanings of social problems.

### **3.2 "Framing" the problem**

To understand the construction process of a problem, a useful theory that analyzes different ways to construct a social problem is framing theory. "Framing refers to the process

by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104). The main theme of framing theories is that an issue can be viewed and constructed differently (Chong & Druckman, 2007). It reveals how human consciousness can be influenced by the transfer of information (Entman, 1993). The analysis of the concept of framing first came from Erving Goffman's book *Frame Analysis* in 1974, which aimed to analyze individuals' construction of reality and define situations during the process of social interaction (Persson, 2018). According to Goffman, a frame is a situational definition, and it influences both the events and individuals' activities within the situation (Goffman, 1974, p. 10f, as cited in Persson, 2018). It is "a context that can be something else depending on how we define what is included in this context" (Persson, 2018, p. 50). For example, in the case of the media's depiction of cyberbullying, the context of a "cyberbullying" situation changes depending on what context has been covered in the news. Erving Goffman's framing analysis drew a line between the front stage of an event (or visible activities of a situation) and the backstage of the event (hidden factors of the situation) (Persson, 2019). As Persson (2018) emphasized, Goffman's framing analysis "demonstrates that other perspectives are possible" (Persson, 2018, p. 145). Connecting this concept to my previous sections' analysis of social problems, the meanings or definitions of a social problem can change according to subjective conditions. As discussed earlier, the subjective condition or second-order reality is influenced by different groups of people defining or interpreting it (e.g., the public, the experts). The variance in the definitions among different groups of people can be associated with the framing process. In the following section, I will discuss how the framing process takes place and how it affects audiences.

First, Goffman suggested that people comprehend the meaning of daily events through two major frameworks--the natural frame and the social frame (Hill, 2014). The natural framework refers to natural laws, such as physics and biology. A social frame indicates a live agency (usually understood as humans) that has a will, aim, and sense of control (Goffman, 1974, p. 22, as cited in Hill, 2014). Moreover, 'bridge explanations' refers to explanations we adopt to 'make sense' of events that cannot be understood through the two main themes. This implies that "no event is ever left without a culturally acceptable explanation" (Hill, 2014, p. 7). No matter what happens in a person's everyday life, there is an explanation or reason for it (Hill, 2014). For example, how we analyze nuclear warfare is the same as how we understand things taking place in our daily life (Hill, 2014, pp. 7-8).

An essential concept in framing theory is keying. According to Goffman, keying is to transfer something that has been 'made sense of' by individuals through two major frameworks into something else (Hill, 2014). For example, an image showing the detonation of a bomb on television is a key based on "the potential reality of actual nuclear detonations" (Hill, 2014, p. 8).

Another important concept in framing theory is fabrication. This is a form of manipulation that deliberately distorts the true gravity of an event. An example can be government propaganda (Hill, 2014). In the case of cyberbullying, the seriousness of cyberbullying may also be exaggerated by specific tactics. For example, through salient and selection, which is selecting certain aspects of "a perceived reality and make them more salient" (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

### 3.3 Framing cyberbullying in the media

Researchers have long studied how the media portrays social issues and its influence on public perceptions. In Roberts and Indermaur's study (2005) on media's construction of "road rage", the authors pointed out that impulsive driving-related violence has existed long before media's frame of "road rage". By subjecting this topic to high-profile discussion, the media constructed a new phenomenon which had been widely accepted by the public. Similarly, in the study of opioid analgesic abuse, McGinty et al. (2016) indicated that the news media tends to frame opioid analgesic abuse as a criminal activity rather than a health issue. In the study of domestic terrorism and hate crimes, Taylor (2019) also found that media framing reinforces the legal double standards in defining an act as terrorism. These studies highlighted the media's power in constructing a phenomenon as a "new crime" which creates excessive fear and exaggerated risks of a "crime". Moreover, media depiction or definition of an issue shapes how governments and policymakers respond to it (Roberts & Indermaur, 2005; McGinty et al, 2016; Taylor, 2019). These studies provide a case in point of the relationship between social problem theories and framing theories. Specifically, it reflects how a social issue can be constructed differently by different actors (such as the media), who frame it in a particular way.

Specific to bullying, frames produced through the news have a great impact on public attention and government actions regarding how to deal with bullying. As mentioned earlier, cyberbullying gained public attention and entered policy-makers agenda after media reports on several high-profile suicide cases related to cyberbullying. As Bailey (2014) highlighted, bullying and cyberbullying became a hot topic as a result of the media's depiction of

cyberbullying-related suicide cases for years (e.g., the suicides of Jamie Hubley, Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons). Similarly, in Felt's (2015) article *the incessant image: how dominant news coverage shape Canadian cyberbullying law*, the author pointed out that the Canadian news portrayals of cyberbullying reflect a social problem frame, which focuses on remedies, effects and the definition of a social problem. The media's emphasis on extreme cyberbullying cases raised public attention and calls for new legislation. Such emphasis enables the frame of effects, remedies, and definitions, which fits the social problem pattern.

Moreover, in Cohen and Brook's study (2018) of the evolution of school bullying as a social problem, the authors discussed motivational frames. Specifically, constructing school bullying as a social problem needs a motivational frame. In order to create a motivational frame, news media created a series of moral shocks that linked school bullying with mass school shootings and suicides. These links portrayed school bullying as a serious problem that can cause serious harm to victims. Further, the problem of school bullying was expanded by the news media by including non-physical harms associated with bullying (such as cyberbullying). The authors concluded that the news media's framing of bullying might lead to unrealistic fear and oversimplification of bullying (Cohen & Brook, 2018). Cohen and Brook's examination of the news media framing demonstrates that different emphases or the selection of specific news articles influence how a social problem is perceived by individuals.

In addition to framing a problem's seriousness, a few research investigates how news media frame the causes and responsibilities of school bullying. For example, Kim and Telleen's content analysis (2017) on newspapers revealed that victims and their families tend to be presented as the most responsible for bullying incidents. Moreover, newspapers from

different political parties (such as liberal and conservative newspapers) frame responsibilities differently. Simply speaking, news media can select various frames of bullying depending on the political orientations of news organizations.

Overall, social problem theories and framing theories provide a suitable theoretical framework for me to understand the construction of cyberbullying in Canadian mainstream media. First of all, social problem theories suggest that a phenomenon or a problem does not naturally exist. Instead, a social issue is the result of social constructions by various actors. Meanwhile, the application of framing theory offers insights into different actors' frames on an issue and how these frames shape perceptions. By using social problem theories and framing theory in my research, I am able to explore how cyberbullying is constructed by different actors and what frames have been used in the process.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

### 4.1 Research method and paradigm

Despite the various discourses and research on cyberbullying, there is a lack of studies on how cyberbullying has become a social problem. The purpose of my research is to investigate how cyberbullying has been framed as a social problem in Canadian news articles. Specifically, what actors are involved in constructing cyberbullying as a social problem? How is cyberbullying being depicted in various news articles? In order to achieve such a research purpose, there is a need to analyze the meanings of the data being collected. Therefore, a qualitative research method, which aims to foster an understanding of the meanings and experiences of individuals' lives under their social context (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002), would be appropriate for my research.

In addition to selecting a research method, the choice of paradigms is crucial to research, as it provides "a framework or philosophy of science that makes assumptions about the nature of reality and truth, the kinds of questions to explore, and how to go about doing so" (Glesne, 2010, p. 5). It is essential to a study, as it shapes and molds the research based on the framework or limitations of the paradigm (Killion & Fisher, 2018, as cited in Pabel, Pryce and Anderson, 2021). According to Guba and Lincoln (2003), there are three fundamental questions to a paradigm: ontological questions, epistemological questions, and methodological questions. The ontological question asks the nature of reality. The epistemological question considers the relationship between knowledge and the knower or would-be knower under the ontological reality. Finally, the methodological question investigates how inquirers find what they think should be known (Guba & Lincoln, 2003).

This research was conducted under the constructivism paradigm, which seeks to understand the social world of those being studied and interpret it from the subject's point of view (Bogna, Raineri, and Dell, 2020). Ontologically, constructivism is relativist. Under this paradigm, realities are the "product of human intellects" (Guba & Lincoln, 2003, p. 111) and are perceived through multiple social constructions. Therefore, constructivism's realities are subject to individuals or groups that are involved in the constructions. Realities can be altered with the change of constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 2003). Epistemologically, "it is a subject- and object-interrelated view" (Pilarska, 2021, p. 66). The researchers and their subjects interact to produce knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Peters et al., 2013, as cited in Bogna, Raineri and Dell, 2020). Thus, the methodology for constructivism is explanatory and dialectic in nature. It involves the interpretation of data by researchers who are actors rather than information processors in the research process. Consequently, the research findings are generated through a construction process rather than a mere collection of something that already exists (Bogna, Raineri and Dell, 2020; Pilarska, 2021). Simply speaking, research adopting a constructivist paradigm discovers and interprets patterns and themes based on the beliefs and perceptions of the subjects of the research (Bogna, Raineri, and Dell, 2020; Pilarska, 2021).

The constructivism paradigm would fit my research, as the theoretical framework of my research assumes that cyberbullying is constructed as a social problem rather than something that naturally exists. In other words, the reality of cyberbullying as a social problem is socially constructed by individuals or groups involved in the construction processes. This ontological assumption allows me to analyze multiple actors (e.g., parents, lawmakers and schools)

involved in the discourse of cyberbullying and investigate how these actors construct the problem differently. In addition, given that the research findings are created through the interaction between my data and me, constructive epistemology suits my research well. Furthermore, the explanatory and dialectic nature of constructivism methodology aligns with my research, as the goal of my research inquiry is to discover the patterns and themes of the data and interpret them based on the perceptions and beliefs of the actors involved in the construction of cyberbullying. Constructivism is an appropriate paradigm for my research. It guides me to investigate the multiple constructions of cyberbullying and enables my understanding of the beliefs and opinions of different actors who participated in the discussion of cyberbullying.

#### **4.2 Data collection**

It is time to collect data after choosing the research question and methodological approach. According to Gaudet and Robert (2018), there are three basic tools that researchers generally use to produce empirical material: observation, interviews, and documents. Due to the pandemic situation when I was designing my research, in-person interviews became impossible for me, as there are social distancing rules, and I am not in Canada. Therefore, documents that are "readable, tactile, observable, and tangible evidence" (Billups, 2020, p. 2) became my ideal choice. As Gaudet and Robert (2018) point out, the use of documents in qualitative research offers a host of advantages. They are efficient, cost-effective, non-obstructive, and readily available to researchers. Particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability to access data online has been a boon, helping researchers navigate potential challenges with ease.

Documents in qualitative research can be “all kinds of material or electronic artefacts that reveal something about a culture – be it a moving or still image, a plan, a monument, a building or, indeed, a text” (Gaudet & Robert, 2018, p. 41). They are self-descriptions that “settings, organizations, and people produce to represent themselves to themselves and often also to the world” (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997: 45, as cited in Gaudet & Robert, 2018, p. 41). In other words, documents can reflect the thoughts of individuals themselves. In my research, I collected online news articles about cyberbullying, and it is expected that these documents reflect the perceptions of various actors on the problem of cyberbullying.

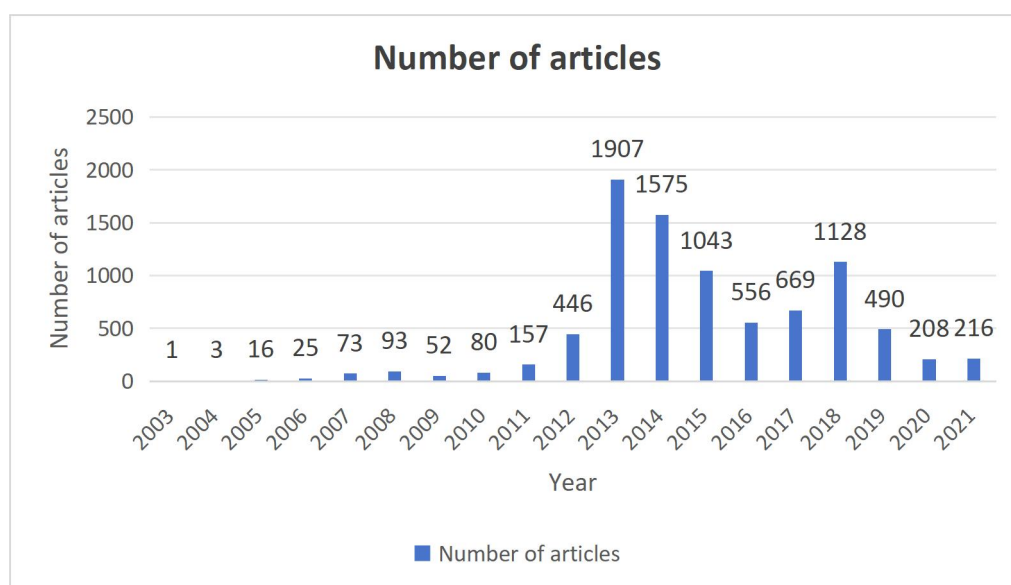
It should be noted that the “Canadian mainstream media” in my research refers to online news articles from Canadian newspapers, and I did not use social media as data. The reason of my choice is that when comparing it to traditional newspapers, information from social media tends to be viewed as lacking reliability and accuracy (e.g., widespread misinformation) (Al-Quran, 2022). In the past, some researchers have also cautioned about the use of information from the Internet, indicating that secondary data from the Internet needs further academic and scientific verification (Stein, 2002, as cited in McNeill & Chapman, 2005). Therefore, I think choosing online news articles from traditional newspapers fits my research better. However, if there is any opportunity for future research, it would be worthwhile to investigate how cyberbullying has been depicted in social media, which will give us an opportunity to see the difference or similarity between traditional media and social media.

Specific to the sampling process, I adopted theoretical sampling for my research. According to Gentles, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbin (2015), theoretical sampling originated

from grounded theory. It is a data-collecting process which aims “to develop categories in terms of their properties and dimensions and integrate those categories (pp.1779-1780). It is used by researchers to understand the emerging theories from the data (Gill, 2020). In the case of my study, by using social problem theory and framing theory as my framework, I intend to gain an in-depth understanding of cyberbullying presented by Canadian news media.

Therefore, using theoretical sampling would enable me to collect articles that may generate theories related to the issue of cyberbullying.

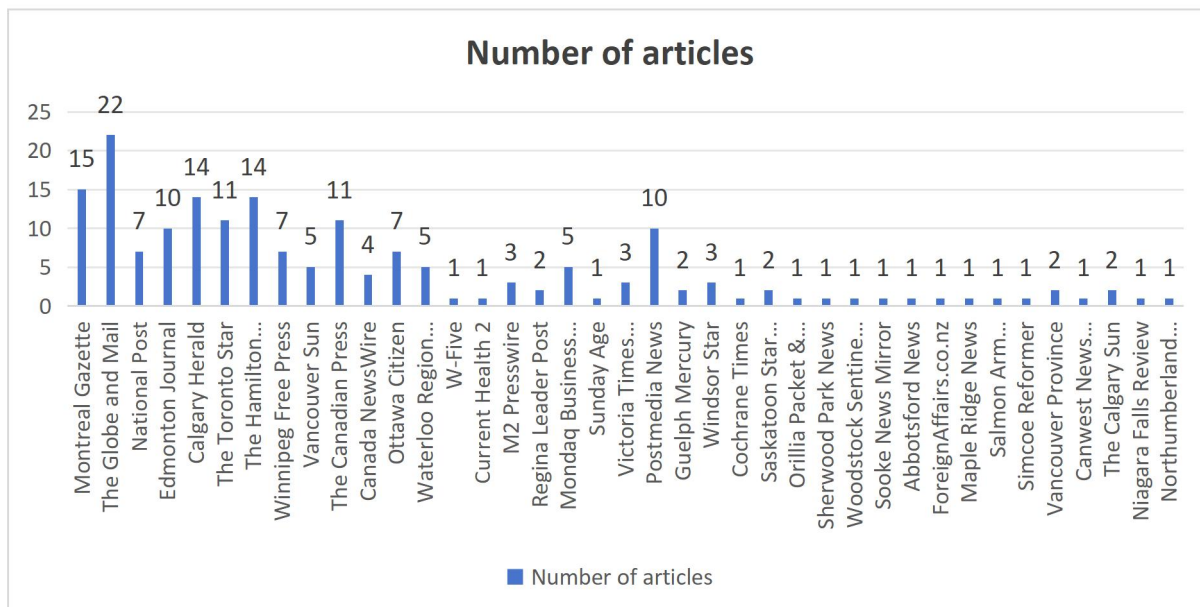
To do so, I used the Factiva database, a research tool that provides access to over 32,000 sources, such as newspapers, journals, and magazines. To limit articles to the most relevant ones, I adjusted the filter to show news articles written in English in the region of Canada from 2000 to 2021. The key word being typed in is “cyberbullying”. The results yield were presented in the following figure:



As the table shows, there are a large number of news articles that fit this category. It would be too time-consuming to go through all these articles. Therefore, I selected some news articles from each year. I would go through news articles each year, from the newest to the

oldest, and select news articles that are relevant and information rich. For example, some news articles contain the key words “cyberbullying”, but the news article is mainly about another topic or story. In this case, I will not select that news article. In terms of how many pieces of information are sufficient for research, Billups (2022) indicated that the number of documents required in a study depends on the “study’s requirements and the application of data saturation and verity” (p. 4). Specifically, the amount of evidence is sufficient when news documents do not yield new insights for the study, and the evidence gathered is complete, relevant, detailed, and within the research scope (Billups, 2022).

Following this principle, I collected news articles up to the point when there did not seem to be new insights on cyberbullying. I finally collected 184 Canadian news articles published between 2000 and 2021. However, it should be noted that there were two news articles that were identical. Therefore, there should be 183 news articles being analyzed. More specifically, the 183 news articles came from 40 Canadian news publishers. Among these publishers, the Globe and Mail, Montreal Gazette, Edmonton Journal, Calgary Herald, The Toronto Star, The Hamilton Spectator, The Canadian Press, and Postmedia News were the main sources. The figure below shows all the news publishers and the number of articles that came from them:



### 4.3 Data analysis

The data analysis method I am adopting is thematic analysis. According to Ezzy (2002), thematic analysis is to identify themes or concepts within the data. While it is similar to content analysis, thematic analysis is more inductive as the researchers have no idea what themes will be categorized before conducting coding. Therefore, "this form of research may take the researcher into issues and problems he or she had not anticipated" (Ezzy, 2002, p. 270).

In terms of the coding process, the thematic analysis contains three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The open coding phase tends to be exploratory. It involves experimenting with the data and identifying units of analysis (Ezzy, 2002). During the open coding, I went through all the data and identified the leading actors that appeared in collected news articles--schools, parents, bystanders, government or lawmakers, individuals themselves, and everyone in society. After that, I focused on analyzing these actors' opinions on the issue of cyberbullying and how they construct cyberbullying as a social problem.

In the axial coding stage, researchers need to specify the coding categories, examine the relationship between codes, and compare codes with preexisting theories. Axial coding aims to "integrate codes around the axes of central categories" (Ezzy, 2002, p. 91). At this stage of coding, I reviewed the data again and identified frames on responsibilities or solutions. Specifically, there are frames about parents' responsibility, schools' responsibility, government's responsibility, and the whole society's responsibility. Therefore, I coded these discussions on responsibilities like parents' responsibility, schools' responsibility, the need for laws, and the whole society's responsibility. While identifying these new themes, I also found the themes about different actors' opinions on the problem of cyberbullying can be categorized as "defining cyberbullying."

The final step of thematic analysis is selective coding. It involves the identification of core categories or the central story of the analysis (Ezzy, 2002). At this stage, I need to refine my coding and consider the central stories of my analysis. Based on my coding, there are two main themes--defining cyberbullying by different actors and solutions and responsibilities. My goal is to analyze how cyberbullying has been defined by different actors and how the collected news articles frame responsibilities. I will gain an in-depth understanding of cyberbullying as a social problem. After meeting with my supervisor about my analysis chapter, we decided to focus on the causes, features, and the evolution of the definition of cyberbullying in my first main theme. In the theme of solutions and responsibilities, I included three sub-themes: (1) services available when cyberbullying takes place; (2) training and socialization for "good use" of social media and technologies; (3) defining the appropriate online behaviors for individuals. These themes cover news frames on government

responsibilities, significant others' responsibilities (especially parents and schools), and individuals themselves responsibilities.

## Chapter 5: Analysis of actors, features and causes

From my thematic analyses, I identified several speakers in the collected online news articles--teachers, parents, practice experts, academics and researchers, and governments and policymakers. These speakers are also the main actors involved in defining cyberbullying and debating the solutions of this issue in the analyzed articles. It's worth mentioning that online newspapers (the mainstream media) are actors or a set of actors in themselves, deciding what information is presented. In the following sections, I will discuss how different actors participated in framing cyberbullying.

### 5.1 Actors

First of all, one set of actors who have played an important role in speaking about cyberbullying in the material I analyzed is school teachers whose definitions of cyberbullying do not seem to have changed substantially over time. Since the term "cyberbullying" appeared in newspapers in 2003, schools have presented and discussed cyberbullying in newspapers as online bullying. Specifically, they called it "cyber- or e-bullying" and described it as the activity of "send[ing] insulting text messages by computer or cell phone" (Lampert, 2003, para 6). This early description also appears to have laid the foundation for the definition of cyberbullying by other actors, which emphasized two elements of cyberbullying--the "cyber" part and the "bullying" part. From the schools' perspective, cyberbullying is "an age-old problem with a high-tech twist" (Martin, 2006, para 7). It is simply bullying with a new form, which "is done through technology such as a phone or a computer, instead of face-to-face" ("Cyberbullying weighs heavily", 2018, para 2). However, one limitation that I've found to this is that the schools' definitions of cyberbullying never really specified what "bullying" itself was before they described cyberbullying as a new

form of bullying --by them or journalists, appearing to rely on readers' general understanding of the word. It is also important to mention that, in earlier journal articles, some schools simply described cyberbullying as "online harassment". For example, in an article from 2007, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board described cyberbullying as "online harassment or ridicule, often involving still photos or video" (Prokaska, 2007, para 6). However, the difference between online bullying and online harassment was rarely discussed further, adding to the confusion in regard to the exact type of actions or behaviours that these articles were referring to and condemning.

Another set of actors that I've identified in my material is the category of "practice experts", which includes, for example, psychiatrists, experts, and social workers in the field of cyberbullying. In regards to experts, their definition of cyberbullying was often equated to "online harassment". As Bill Belsey, the leading expert on cyberbullying, described, "digital bullying or Internet bullying — is harassment that takes place using an electronic medium" (Mitchell, 2004, para 5). Nancy Willard, executive director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use (CSRIU), also mentioned that "online harassment has a name: cyberbullying," which means "using the Internet or cell phones to send hurtful messages or post information that's designed to damage the reputation or friendships of others" (Hayes, 2008, para 3). Furthermore, experts from the stopcyberbullying.org described that cyberbullying occurs when "a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones" (Munn, 2013, para 1). In other words, even though referring to cyberbullying as online harassment keeps this central notion

of "intimidation," experts seem to be invested in using the language of "harassment" instead of bullying in their interventions in newspapers.

Similar to practitioners' and technical experts' definitions, academics' and researchers' definitions of bullying in the analyzed material seem to center more on the medium and "using electronic communication tools" (Schmidt, 2005, para 3). Moreover, academics and researchers also underlined the lack of information on cyberbullying as a growing phenomenon when quoted in news articles (Volk, 2013). As Faye Mishna, a professor at the University of Toronto, pointed out, the problem of cyberbullying is "much larger than we have any idea of, and I think it is going to keep growing" (Patch, 2006, para 7). A newspaper article from 2013 also reported that "at a recent conference of more than 7,000 developmental scientists, a session on cyberbullying revealed that the 40 or so studies on it cannot even agree on a basic definition" (Volk, 2013, para 3). In other words, academics and researchers highlighted this issue of defining cyberbullying and the problem with studying cyberbullying without a sort of stronger consensus around the definition.

Furthermore, governments and policymakers have invested significant efforts in the material I have analyzed to identify a specific definition of cyberbullying. Their apparent urge to specify behaviors constituting cyberbullying is often presented in newspaper articles as a result of several high-profile suicide cases associated with cyberbullying and in reaction to the public demanding actions from the government. The process of creating a legal definition for cyberbullying has been long and complex. The articles that I have analyzed show how, in 2009, a private member's bill called Bill C-355 was introduced to make cyberbullying a crime under the Criminal Code and defined cyberbullying as "repeated telephone calls or [...]"

repeated electronic messages to any person with the intent to harass" (Mr Intellectual Property Group, 2009, para 5). As we can see, this definition focuses on the repetition of communications and the intention of harassment.

In 2013, while some news articles suggested dealing with cyberbullying through criminal harassment under criminal law, some actors, like lawyers and academics, cautioned about the distinction between cyberbullying and harassment. Specifically, the goal of cyberbullying somebody is often not presented in articles as being to cause fear but rather to "harmfully affect(s) the psyche" of a person (Lungu, 2013, para 6). In contrast, as the Nova Scotian lawmakers specified in regards to the Cyber-safety Act, cyberbullying is presented as "any electronic communication intended to, or that could reasonably have been expected to, 'cause fear, intimidation, humiliation, distress or other damage or harm to another person's health, emotional well-being, self-esteem or reputation'" ("If Cyber-safety Act is worth the price", 2013, para 5). Despite these specifications, the existing definition of cyberbullying is still too broad to be used for the criminalization of cyberbullying. For example, some news articles asked what behaviors will fall into the category of causing harm to a person's emotional well-being or self-esteem (Levant, 2013). Furthermore, a news article criticized that the definition of the Cyber-safety Act was too vague and "is going to be pushed to its limits--where it will run right smack into the Charter of Rights and Freedoms" ("Nova Scotia's cyberbullying law", 2014, para 4). More generally, the current legal definitions of cyberbullying, as presented in the news articles that I have analyzed, seem to have failed to draw a clear line between legal and illegal behavior, which would lead to conflicts between cyberbullying laws and other laws. Due to these conflicts, the Cyber-safety Act was struck

down in 2015 for violating freedom of expression and an individual's right to life, liberty, and security of the person under the Canadian Charter (Dinning, 2017). Simply put, although governments and policymakers have some specific requirements for the definition of cyberbullying, the term still appears to be too broad, as these specifications cover a wide range of behaviours.

Last but not least, the mainstream media that I have covered in this research has played an essential role in the process of defining cyberbullying. As mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter, media has the power to construct an issue by selecting specific information to present or making certain information salient. In the case of cyberbullying, I found that the number of online articles pertaining to cyberbullying has been changing overtime. By entering the word "cyberbullying" in the search area, selecting "all dates," and choosing "Canada" as the region in FACTIVE, the results showed that the term "cyberbullying" first appeared in Canadian news in 2003. Since then, diverse topics that include the issue of cyberbullying have been continuously mentioned in newspapers, especially around certain events like the suicide of Amanda Todd in 2012. As reflected in the number of articles found each year, from 2003 to 2011, the number of hits on news articles with the keyword "cyberbullying" tended to be low (the lowest is one article in 2003, and the highest is 192 articles in 2011). However, in 2012, the number of hits sharply increased to 656, and in 2013, the number of articles related to cyberbullying grew to 1972, the highest number between 2003 and 2021 (between 2012 and 2013, two teenagers, Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons, committed suicide as a result of cyberbullying). In other words, the mainstream

media presented more information about cyberbullying around the time where several suicide cases occurred.

Overall, there is no clear definition of cyberbullying, whether from a legal or other perspective. Although different actors in the material I've analyzed tend to agree that it is similar to bullying, harassment, or insults carried out through electronic communication, there is no consensus on the types of behaviors carried out online that would warrant such a label. As mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter, Lauer (1976) asked about who should have the power to define a social problem. Can any actors have a say in constructing a social problem? And who can decide which definition fits the most? As in the case of cyberbullying, different actors participated in defining cyberbullying and these actors have provided their understanding of cyberbullying, not reaching a consensus. The questions raised by this include whether or not it is even possible to create a legal definition of this phenomenon, who should have the power to define cyberbullying, and how does the mainstream media influence the public's understanding of it?

## **5.2 Features of cyberbullying**

Another important theme that I identified through my analysis is the "features" of cyberbullying, the attributes that are said to be distinctive. Among the collected news articles, three critical features of cyberbullying are often repeated. Firstly, actors often refer to the sense of anonymity associated with cyberbullying. For example, a spokesperson for the Canadian School Boards Association expresses that, being online "[i]t gives them a sense of anonymity, [...] They figure, 'Oh well, I can't be tracked' "(Lampert, 2003, para 7). This reference to "being tracked" or a certain "fear" of being tracked that is absent shows that, at

least in some regard, the online and technological components of cyberbullying are seen to have the potential to change how people “feel” about what they do. On that same note, other actors explain that it can change how people who engage in cyberbullying feel about what they do to others or even how they feel about what others feel: “Being anonymous and far away, they are also immune to the tears of the bullied and removed from feeling empathy for them, he said. The result is painful and sometimes debilitating” (Mitchell, 2004, para 15). However, does anonymity really prevent bullies from feeling no remorse for their actions? When someone writes or posts something on the Internet, aren’t they aware of his or her actions? I would argue that, whether online or offline, the words that we say have purposes. Individuals post or comment on something online with intentions. They can imagine how he/she would feel when these words were said to themselves. Anonymity and not feeling the “tears” of the victim could be understood by some as just ways for bullies to protect themselves and find excuses for their actions. In the future study, researchers can investigate why individuals post or comment on certain things online, and whether they have a purpose or intention. If an intention to hurt can be identified in online speech, the nature of cyberbullying might be understood differently.

Another point is that the distance also changes who are thought of as being “able” to do cyberbullying, playing with sometimes stereotypical understandings of the “classic bully”. As expert Montgomery expresses, “the Internet is a fertile ground for bullies because anyone can adopt a false identity online. Anonymity means a bully doesn't need to be physically strong to be intimidating” (McKeen, 2007, para 7). In the same line of thought, Montgomery adds that "a lot of power rests with the kids who have technical know-how," says Montgomery. "And

the anonymity can be quite intimidating, because you don't know who is sending you this message"(McKeen, 2007, para 8). The bully is not necessarily a “jock”, but could also be a “geek”.

Moreover, being online is often presented as a problem in regards to not knowing for certain who the bullies or bullied “are”. As one article said, “cyberbullies can often remain anonymous, masking their identities by creating false Facebook profiles or using temporary email accounts” (Urosevic, 2013, para 13). Although it is not explicit here, there is also the idea that one user could create multiple accounts. This sense of uncertainty is presented as a perceived danger. For example, a news article adds that “it permits bullies to hide behind a screen, and to bully without revealing their true identity. This means the attacker does not know who their tormenters are, making the situation all the more frightening and harder to report” (Munn, 2013, para 6).

These data indicate that many actors quoted in the news articles are said to believe that the sense of anonymity in cyberbullying allows bullies to feel “empowered” because it allows them to act without exposing their identities. This finding can be related to some previous research, such as Barlett and Gentile’s (2012) study of predictors of cyberbullying, and Barlett, Gentile, and Chew’s (2016) research on anonymity and cyberbullying attitudes, where they argue that individuals’ attitudes toward cyberbullying are indeed associated with perceived anonymity.

Another important feature of cyberbullying is that there are no time and space constraints in cyberbullying. It has a sort of “continuity”, and can take place wherever the “target” is. Indeed, different from traditional bullying, cyberbullying could take place

anywhere and anytime. “Unlike physical bullying which occurs in a school or a neighborhood, cyberbullying does not require physical proximity. Cyberbullying permits behavior of harassment despite the possible physical distance between the bully and the victim” (Urosevic, 2013, para 15). For some actors reported in the news articles that I analyzed, this was understood as a worsening of the risks and consequences, compared to traditional bullying: “Cyber bullying is worse than the regular schoolyard kind because it knows no bounds of time, space or geography. A bullied child used to be able to go home to escape. Now, bullying can happen when a child is in his or her own bedroom with a cellphone” (Mitchell, 2004, para 12).

Because of this, cyberbullying threats are sometimes defined as particularly serious for young children, since it can go beyond the schoolyard, and it creates a perception to victims that bullying can follow them everywhere and they cannot escape from it. As one article mentioned, “there are growing fears about the rise of cyberbullying and its impact on children. Unlike traditional face-to-face bullying, a bully can conceal their identity online and target their victims constantly without the limits of location or time” (“We don’t know the true extent of cyberbullying”, 2020, para 1). Similarly, another news article expresses that “it is far harder to escape cyberbullying in our “plugged-in” world, as technology is an unavoidable and inescapable fact of life, creating a situation where the torment is all the more constant and unavoidable. Gone are the days when being home meant being safe from bullying” (Munn, 2013, para 6). Indeed, this sort of omnipresence makes it that there is also “no escape” from it, or at least there might be a feeling that one is trapped in this violence. As Bonnie Leadbeater, a psychology professor at the University of Victoria and a developer of a program called

WITS argues, this is also understood as having direct consequences for the victims of this type of behavior: “Cyberbullying can be more harmful because you can't walk away from it, so it's harder to escape, and it can have serious effects on someone's mental health” (“Cyberbullying weighs heavily”, 2018, para 5).

The third essential feature that I will cover here is how cyberbullying seemingly allows for more individuals to participate in the bullying, individuals that might not have known of the situation or participated in the situation if it had not been online. Speaking about an incident in relation to a 14-year-old student whose threatening e-mail about his teacher was made public, the victim said that "anyone could visit the site," she said. "And if some crazy person got hold of this message, I wouldn't be safe."(Lampert, 2003, para 9). Another person, Dr. Tanya Beran, professor of school psychology at the University of Calgary, adds this in regards to the online bullying situation: “On the Internet, this audience becomes, in theory, the entire world, amplifying its impact on the victim.” (Frazer-Harrison, 2008, para 9).

In some ways, this connects to the feature of “continuity”, since it allows the actions, events and their consequences to “live” endlessly and grow in online communities. As one news article expresses: “the nature of the internet is such that an almost unlimited number of people can join in on the bullying, by commenting or re-posting comments or photos on electronic pages” (Urosevic, 2013, para 15). Similarly, another news article indicated that “written threats are hard to ignore because they can be read over and over” (McGinnis, 2007, para 16). Indeed, these have direct consequences for the people that are targeted, as one article mentions: “The effects of cyberbullying are longer lasting. Once a hurtful comment or picture is posted online or texted, it can be circulated again and again, causing terrible and repeated

suffering for the victim” (Munn, 2013, para 7).

### 5.3 Causes

On top of the different actors and the different features of cyberbullying, another theme that helped to define it as a social problem in my analyses was related to what is said to “cause” cyberbullying. Indeed, hypothesizing what the causes might be or making an argument for something to be its root cause almost always served the purpose of defining it as a specific “kind” of problem. Several possible causes of cyberbullying were identified in the data through the analysis.

The first cause is online disinhibition, which is associated with the feature of anonymity. As several news articles mentioned: “The disinhibition effect is why you might feel tempted -- or give in to the temptation -- to say rude, harsh or otherwise hateful things online that you would never say in person” (Kleiss, 2010, para 6). For others, this meant that “People just feel free to ignore social rules that would hold in other situations” (Kleiss, 2010, para 4). And similarly, Rider University psychologist John Suler argues that “When acting out hostile feelings, the person doesn't have to take responsibility for those actions. In fact, people might even convince themselves that those behaviors aren't me at all.” (Kleiss, 2010, para 12). All of this is important because it shows that many actors involved in speaking about cyberbullying in the material that I analyzed understood the anonymity feature as something that influenced “how” people “felt” about what they said, shared or wrote, sometimes not caring about the hurt it generated and sometimes not even thinking that it would be as hurtful as it was.

Part of the reason for this was that the anonymity feature was said to allow people to

take action without feeling “responsible” for what they were doing, not being able to “witness” the consequences of their actions. For example, one article says: “Unlike the big hulking bully, cyberbullies are the most cowardly sort, often anonymous and too afraid to face their victims. But the pain they cause can be devastating and has even driven a few victims to suicide” (Varadi, 2006, para 4). In a similar way, Glenn Stutzky, a professor at the school of social work at Michigan State University said that “being anonymous and far away, they are also immune to the tears of the bullied and removed from feeling empathy for them” (Mitchell, 2004, para 15).

According to Suler (2004), online disinhibition is a phenomenon that individuals engage in things or territories that they would never delve into in the real world. For example, in the cyber space, people may “self-disclose or act out more frequently or intensely than they would in person” (Suler, 2004, p. 321). As Suler (2004) argued, one of the main factors that leads to the online disinhibition effect is anonymity, as we have also seen in the examples provided. The sense of anonymity online makes individuals feel that they can separate their online activities from their real-world identities and behaviors. Similarly, Barlett, Gentile, and Chew (2016) argued that individuals feel dissociated from their real-life moral standards when being online, which has been voiced by the actors within the news articles that I analyzed. In other words, it could be understood as if individuals engage in cyberbullying because they feel their online actions are not bound by social rules and responsibilities. This implies that the cause of cyberbullying is a lack of moral standards on the Internet. And if the cause of the problem is morality, does it mean the solution of cyberbullying lies in moral education?

Another cause being mentioned in the data is said to be the lack of surveillance in cyberspace as a form of social control. As an article in 2013 mentioned, “electronic forums often lack supervision” (Urosevic, 2013, para 14). Compared with real-world settings, such as classrooms which are often under the monitoring of responsible adults, such roles who can be present to handle incidents of bullying are absent in online spaces (Urosevic, 2013).

News articles did not often mention this theme explicitly, that of a lack of supervision. Rather, it was emphasized through the argued importance and responsibility of parents and schools to, indeed, supervise their children when discussing solutions to cyberbullying. For example, one news article says:

For youth, and people who actively engage in online social communities, the Internet is not some disconnected "other" space. It is an integral extension of their social worlds, a place that is just as real as the playground at recess or the local neighborhood rink. The most distinguishing feature of these spaces might be that they are free of parents, referees and coaches (Churchill, 2007, para 8).

This often-articulated questions of supervision as a “cause” to putting the “blame” on those thought to be responsible for said supervision: “Parents abdicate responsibility for checking what their kids do” (Martin, 2006, para 31). Such arguments are also understood in the articles that were analyzed, as rooted in past practices around parenting. As one article said, “parents have always modelled behavior around relationships, alcohol, driving, smoking, and other activities, but parents are far behind their kids on understanding and using technology” (Martin, 2006, para 47). Similarly, “Parents wouldn't buy their child a car and hand over the keys without making sure they'd had driver training first. Unfortunately, many

people will buy their child a smartphone without preparing them for the risks that come along with the opportunities” (Jaffer & Brazeau, 2012, para 2). In other words, the idea is that, partly due to the rapid development of technology, adults might not have been equipped with experience and skills to supervise their children, as interactions with friends, peers and strangers moved to the online world. Moreover, the word supervision is vague. How do we supervise children? More importantly, will supervision of the online world and individuals’ online activities be practical?

While the above two causes emphasized how advanced technology enables individuals to conduct cyberbullying, some news articles also argued that a third important cause of cyberbullying was that of “problematic social values”. The idea here actually somewhat runs in contradiction to some of the other causes, meaning that what we observe in cyberbullying is the result of cultural or societal changes beyond the Internet. As one article said, “There's no adult supervision and kids are left to their own devices, but that's not the underlying cause of their savagery” (Maughan, 2008, para 2). More broadly:

Is anti-social cyber behavior actually a result of the Internet? What if this behavior has been going on for years and the Internet is merely a window into adolescent life? What if the Internet is not to blame but instead can be more accurately understood as a video camera trained on the playground of our youth (Churchill, 2007, para 3)?

This implies that the problem is with the broader context in which children grow up, with another article arguing that "When you read deeper into it, you see the society the children come from is not a healthy one"(Maughan, 2008, para 3).

What is interesting here is that this specific cause is not necessarily just a sort of

“nostalgia” for the past, but opens up a debate on the type of society we are living in and the types of power relations that exist. For example, pointing to one of the first heavily mediated incidents, expert Shirley McCann expresses that “Amanda experienced a very specific kind of bullying, directly related to her gender. Thus far, the media has said very little to acknowledge this fact” (“Amanda Todd: lessons to be learned”, 2012, para 7). Continuing on that same point, they add that “Using more specific terminology such as "sexual harassment" or "slut shaming" would be one way to address that omission and open the doors more widely to discussions that examine the roots of misogyny, which extend far, far beyond the anonymity of the Internet” (“Amanda Todd: lessons to be learned”, 2012, para 8). But as others mention, there is also the sense that “Bullying stems from a belief that being different is not acceptable, that social exclusion is tolerable, that bullying is a natural part of growing up, and that bystanders are neutral parties in a dispute” (Bishop & Malloy, 2011, para 9). In other words, the root cause of cyberbullying can be attributed to deeper social problems in society. This suggests that the solution of cyberbullying lies in addressing other social issues, rather than targeting cyberbullying.

Overall, three causes of cyberbullying are found in the data--online disinhibition, lack of supervision, and social values children learned from adults and society. These discussions on causes in the collected news articles revealed that the Canadian news media tend to frame cyberbullying as a problem connected with broader social issues. Such a frame hints that cyberbullying is the result of a lack of moral standards and deeper social issues. Moreover, by framing the cause of cyberbullying as lack of supervision, the media treats cyberbullying more as an individual issue, and lays blame on individuals rather than institutions.

## **Chapter 6: Analysis on how to deal with cyberbullying**

The previous chapter explored the definitions of cyberbullying, its features, and the causes of this phenomenon. In this chapter, I will analyze the ongoing debates about how to deal with cyberbullying which has been presented in the collected news articles. Specifically, the collected news articles discussed the responsibilities of different actors--bullies and bullied, bystanders, parents, professionals and institutions when dealing with cyberbullying. Based on the collected data, individual responsibilities and behaviors have been the main focus, instead of various forms of social control. In the following section, I will discuss the different responsibilities being framed in the Canadian news articles.

### **6.1 Bullies and bullied**

Some news articles pointed out that individuals themselves are accountable for their actions. Specifically, children need to learn how to protect themselves from cyberbullying, and meanwhile, they need to realize that there are consequences to their actions.

To protect oneself from cyberbullying, children must first understand that "the Internet is not a private place" (Martin, 2006, para 28). Individuals' personal information might be leaked, which could cause harm to a person's life. As expert Bill Belsey mentioned, "don't share your username and password even if it's with a friend," and "people can use it in a nasty way. Someone can pretend they're you and cause your reputation so much damage it could actually be impossible to recover" (Varadi, 2006, para 13).

Moreover, the Internet is a public place; everything being posted or written on it can be viewed by countless people and cannot be taken back. Children need to realize that there are consequences to their online actions. On the one hand, what children send or post on the

Internet can be exploited by others to cyberbully themselves. In one news article, a victim of cyberbullying, whose intimate pictures were posted by her ex-boyfriend, warned that students need to "consider the fact that anyone around the world can view whatever they post on the web" (McGinnis, 2007, para 17). As McGill University Professor Shaheen Shariff indicated, "kids don't realize how many people will have access to their comments" (Seidman, 2012, para 4). To protect oneself from cyberbullying, expert Bill Belsey emphasized that children need to "think before they click" (Escott, 2011, para 13), and they need to realize that "when something is said on the Internet, it can't be taken back" (Escott, 2011, para 12). As several news articles suggested:

- "Don't send something to someone when you're angry" (Martin, 2006, para 42).
- "If you do come across a nasty webpage about you or get a mean instant-message, don't respond" (Varadi, 2006, para 14).
- "They (victims) should keep copies of messages and show them to an adult" (Varadi, 2006, para 17).
- "We say never respond to the cyberbully, you need to report it" (Martin, 2006, para 40).

On the other hand, children who are cyberbullying others "need to understand when they post something online what kind of legal risk it has" (Seidman, 2012, para 4). For example, "spreading hate about someone is illegal. Once it's out there, it's difficult to take back" (Varadi, 2006, para 20). In one article, a father whose teenage son experienced years of bullying and committed suicide indicated that "the electronic age is a killer because kids think they can Facebook, post stuff and videotape on phones and get away with it", and "people should start

being held responsible for their actions" (Escott, 2011, para 2). Therefore, for cyber bullies, the suggestion delivered from news articles is also that be careful when typing something onto the Internet. However, the question is: is it easy for children to understand that what they are typing or posting has consequences? Can we expect children to keep copies of messages, or not send messages when they are angry?

Furthermore, some news articles indicate that the best way for children to protect themselves is to build resilience and develop interpersonal skills. In one news article, British child development expert Helene Guldberg argued that advocates of anti-bullying laws and programs are interventionists who have been cultivating a "culture of victimhood" and "playing down the resilience of ordinary children" (Wente, 2013, para 8). In Helene Guldberg's view, "learning to deal with conflict, aggression, embarrassment, negative relationships and rejection is a crucial part of growing up" (Wente, 2013, para 8). Similarly, an article in 2019 indicated that resilience and interpersonal skills "are key in developing the ability to resist bullying or the ability to intervene when needed and can greatly mitigate the effect of cyberbullying" (Mamlok & Chang-Kredl, 2019, para 15). In order to do so, students need to "critically reflect on their assumptions and feelings about aspects of identity — including race, gender and social class, or their own positions in society and their own behaviour" (Mamlok & Chang-Kredl, 2019, para 17). However, an issue here is: how would students learn resilience and interpersonal skills? Who is responsible for teaching them?

Simply speaking, these news articles suggest that individuals are responsible for themselves. They need to understand that the Internet is a public place, and when they post or send something on the Internet, there are risks and consequences. Furthermore, children need

to build resilience and interpersonal skills so that they know how to "handle vulnerable situations" (Mamlok & Chang-Kredl, 2019, para 5). But the problem with attributing responsibilities on individuals themselves is that these requirements for children may be beyond children's competence, such as building resilience, or not responding when feeling angry.

## **6.2 Bystanders**

Beyond bullies and victims themselves, bystanders' behaviors also play a crucial role in dealing with cyberbullying. However, in the digital context, who is a bystander? In real life, a bystander usually has to be present when an incident happens, but when bullying occurs online, no physical presence is required; who are the bystanders? In news articles, there has been a lack of discussion on the definition of bystander. However, there is a general sense that bystanders are individuals who can speak up for the victims of cyberbullying. In one news article, Debra Pepler, a scientific co-director of PREVNet, indicated that a bystander in online bullying refers to anyone who is not part of the problem. Being part of the problem is "in some way joining the bullying rather than indicating dissatisfaction and displeasure with it" (La Rose, 2013, para 4). For example, when a child sees someone's photo being posted in the media, being part of the problem would be writing mean comments or sending it to more people (La Rose, 2013).

In the news articles that I collected, peers and friends have been the most common types of bystanders. The power of a bystander could be great in helping victims of cyberbullying defend themselves. As one article emphasized, "the cycle of violence can be interrupted when even one person has the moral strength and courage to resist a bully, defend

those who are targeted, or give witness to the cruelty in order to get it stopped" (Roesler, 2008, para 8). Similarly, in a news story related to a high-school girl who was attacked on Myspace and pictures were being posted and circulated, the bullying was finally stopped due to the help of her soccer teammates. According to the victim, "they basically said, 'Cut the crap.' Then other kids started sticking up for me too" (Hayes, 2008, para 14). An expert emphasized that "one of the best protections against cyberbullying is having friends who speak up and say that's not OK" (Hayes, 2008, para 14). Similarly, another article suggested that "because this sort of bullying is socially motivated, the most powerful inhibitor for this is actually clear messaging from their peers that bullying isn't cool and that it's unacceptable" (La Rose, 2013, para 13). In other words, cyberbullying can be prevented when individuals can stand up for others and show disapproval of such behavior.

While peers and friends have been specific examples of bystanders, the definition of bystander, in fact, includes anyone who is not the problem. This suggests that everyone in society could be a bystander in the situation of cyberbullying, and therefore, everyone is responsible for preventing cyberbullying. As one news article pointed out, "students, parents, guardians, educators and community members can work together so that people's differences are met with respect. Speaking out to stop bullying is crucial. Bullying touches us all. This is why we must all find solutions, together." (Bishop & Malloy, 2011, para 10). Similarly, one article emphasized that "every single person can be a problem solver and an agent for change when it comes to bullying" (McIntyre, 2012, para 9). Especially as adults, they need to realize their responsibility to guide youth's behaviors and social values through role modeling. As one news article stressed, "it's the constant, close involvement of responsible adults – parents,

teachers, coaches, bus drivers, aunts, uncles, neighbours – who're aware of their role in modelling good conduct, empathy and emotional regulation" (Wente, 2012, para 6). Similarly, expert Bill Belsey indicated, "we need to show leadership and to model the type of behaviour we want to see" (Patch, 2006, para 36), and "demonstrate that politicians can engage in discourse rather than yelling and calling names", and "we need to show by example that we are all responsible for our behaviour - online and in everyday life" (Patch, 2006, item 8).

Overall, the collected news articles framed the word “bystanders” as anyone remotely connected to the situations. This implies that cyberbullying is a problem for everyone, not just certain individuals' problems. This connects to the previous chapter where cyberbullying is viewed by some actors as a reflection for deeper social problems, and everyone in society needs to work together to create positive social values.

### **6.3 Parents**

Among the collected news articles, parents have been framed as the main responsibility holders. As one news article pointed out, "much of the responsibility for keeping young Internet users safe falls to parents" and "if we teach our children how to safely cross the street, we ought also to teach them to safely navigate the web" (“Practising safe surfing”, 2008, para 6). Similarly, another article highlighted the necessity of parents training their children on the proper use of technology by comparing children's access to electronic devices with access to a car. "Parents wouldn't buy their child a car and hand over the keys without making sure they'd had driver training first. Unfortunately, many people will buy their child a smartphone without preparing them for the risks that come along with the opportunities" (Jaffer & Brazeau, 2012, para 2). Simply speaking, parents have been regarded as having a mandatory responsibility to

train their children on how to use the technology properly. As an article mentioned, "parents must never abdicate their own role in protecting their children from online sexual predators and bullies" ("Practising safe surfing", 2008, para 1). The message behind such arguments echoes the importance that some have placed on family, education and primary socialization for a diversity of social issues.

The next step for parents to educate youth on the positive use of technology is to provide moral guidance for children's online behaviors. As one news article mentioned, "Parents need to imbue their kids with a moral code that includes the Internet" (Kheiriddin, 2013, para 9). In other words, children learn how to behave on the Internet through parents' moral education. Similarly, another online news article emphasized the importance of parents' modeling. In the news article, Lianna MacDonald, executive director of Child Find Manitoba indicated that "parents have always modelled behaviour around relationships, alcohol, driving, smoking, and other activities, but parents are far behind their kids on understanding and using technology," (Martin, 2006, para 47) and "there needs to be a significant wake-up call to parents. On the Internet, there was no adult modelling of what behaviour was appropriate" (para 48). Simply speaking, parents have been framed by some news articles as the best actor to model or morally educate youth on how to behave in cyberspace. However, moral education from parents tends to be lacking. In order to provide moral guidance for youth, some news articles highlighted the need for parents to teach children positive social norms. There is a need "to create an empathetic online culture. Fostering empathy and encouraging students to treat each other with kindness and respect will promote positive online behaviour" (MediaSmarts, 2015, para 4). For example, they should teach children to be "responsible

citizens with this kind of technology" (Frazer-Harrison, 2008, para 25). Moreover, parents should teach their children not to become a bully. As an expert mentioned:

Hundreds of parents I have addressed want to know the warning signs that a child is being bullied...but I have never had a single parent ask me to outline the warning signs that would suggest that his or her own child is a bully (Sklar, 2011, para 6-7).

More often than not, parents see their children as someone who needs to be protected from cyberbullying. However, they should also remind themselves that their children can also bully others. "Bullies have mothers and fathers too. They don't go from compassionate individuals to tormentors overnight. They grow that way" (Sklar, 2011, para 8). Simply put, moral education from parents influences how a child treats others.

In addition to moral education, some news articles suggested the need for parents to supervise their children's use of technology. These news articles indicated that parents are responsible for knowing what their child is doing online. In one news article, a teenager's mother stated, "parents need to be aware of what their kids are up to online. It may not be that they're doing the bullying, but curiosity or boredom might lead them into something terrible" (Luymes, 2010, para 7). Similarly, another article criticized that "it's odd that parents who monitor what their children eat, scrutinizing every food package for signs of trans fat, wouldn't feel a similar urge to monitor what websites their children visit" ("Practising safe surfing", 2008, para 6). As Olga Wyshnowsky, Winnipeg School Division's consultant for pupil services, pointed out, "Parents abdicate responsibility for checking what their kids do" (Martin, 2006, para 31). As mentioned earlier, parents have been viewed as obligated to train their children on the "good use" of technology. Their supervision of children's online activities

has also been regarded as a requisite, and they were blamed for the lack of monitoring.

Connected with a previous chapter which indicated that one of the causes of cyberbullying is lack of supervision, asking parents to be responsible for what their children are doing shows that the responsibility for supervision becomes parents' responsibility. However, is it realistic to expect parents to do all the work? Is it feasible to supervise youth's online activities?

According to some of the news articles, supervising youth's online activities is not easy for parents. In an age of technology, knowing what others are doing online is a challenge. What parents are facing is "a Tech-Savvy Generation" and controlling the Internet use of youth is "one of the bigger challenges of modern parenting" (Gordon, 2007, para 1). Parents lack the necessary technological skills to keep up with their children and understand what they are doing online. "kids are connected all of the time -- they are completely wired, all of the time," which leads to "a huge disconnect between parents and children" (Martin, 2006, para 32). Without a certain degree of knowledge in technology, parents will not be able to understand youth's online activities. As an article in 2016 emphasized, "even if they are in the same room with you, they are not necessarily being supervised" (O'Brien, 2016, para 9). In other words, supervising the online activities of youth requires parents to not only physically watch their children, but also understand what their children are doing with the technologies.

However, understanding technologies takes a lot effort. As one news article pointed out, "adults need to educate themselves about what youth do on the Internet, what sites they visit, and how the sites work (e.g., Facebook or MySpace)" (Craig & Pepler, 2009, para 8). For example, as one article suggested, parents should "become familiar with sites your child visits on the Internet and how online communication works, including instant messaging,

blogs, and chat rooms" (Frazer-Harrison, 2008, para 28). And "if your child likes Facebook, then learn what the site is about, learn how you can prevent and report abuse, learn some of the (site's) safety mechanisms like privacy settings" (Frazer-Harrison, 2008, para 21). In addition, parents can also learn from their children. As one article indicated, the best way for parents to learn technology is "to do this is with the youth, themselves. Allow them to be the experts to educate you and show you how the technology works" (Craig & Pepler, 2009, para 9). Simply speaking, due to the knowledge gap on the Internet between parents and children, supervising the online activities of youth requires parents to equip themselves with skills and familiarity with technology. However, the question is, would it be easy for parents to learn the knowledge and skills needed for them to understand their children? Is it practicable to ask parents to know how to use Internet technology?

Furthermore, another limitation of supervising youth's online activities is the negative effect of always checking children's online activities. A few news articles cautioned that such scrutiny should not deprive a child of privacy. As one article indicated:

Don't even think about reading your child's e-mail or checking out the sites they've visited... That's like reading (someone's) diary. It's snooping, it's rude, it's inappropriate, it's disrespecting your child and, trust me, they will find out because they are more technologically adept than we are (Summerfield, 2007 para 46-47).

Similarly, in an article discussing the problem of parents buying software to check everything their child does with their phone, some criticized that such a tactic of monitoring will impede children's ability to "make their own sound decisions" (Bielski, 2009, para 13). In other words, monitoring youth's online activities does not mean parents can check everything

a child does online. However, where the boundary should be set for parental scrutiny remains unclear and requires further study.

Overall, parents have been presented by many online news articles as the leading actors responsible for training and teaching children the proper use of social media and technology, and they tend to be blamed when incidents of cyberbullying happen to their children.

However, the problem with parents' education or control of their children is that it is not easy for parents to possess the knowledge and skills needed to supervise their children. The power of parents is limited when dealing with online problems.

#### **6.4 Schools**

In addition to parents, school is another actor that news articles have framed as holding the primary responsibility for teaching students the good use of technology and helping them build healthy social relationships with others. As one article mentioned, "the solution, ironically, lies in the classrooms where the teachers educate the children, including cyberbullies" ("Teach cyberbullies", 2008, para 7). Schools need to teach children emotional literacy, which enables children to learn how to interact with each other respectfully. As an article emphasized: "It's wrong to say that time spent working with children to grow them into people who treat each other with respect, who know and use tools for fixing social relations when they're broken, is time wasted" (Kates, 2006, para 15). Instead, "now it's time to put a priority on emotional literacy. Dare to dream how much better the world would be if every child learned peace in school" (Kates, 2006, para 17). Similarly, another news article indicated that schools play a crucial role in "teach[ing] students to be responsible digital citizens who can safely navigate the cyber world" (Seidman, 2011, para 4). "Schools need to

inform students about cyberbullying, about that type of aggression" (Riga, 2007, para 11). For example, some university professors suggested that schools can ask students how they would like schools to draft online codes of conduct (Maughan, 2008). Some schools have created various policies and systems so that "principals can access district-level support for any situation they feel is a threat to the safety of their students, inside or outside of the school" (Johnson & Kuester, 2005, para 6). Simply speaking, the news articles I collected greatly emphasized school education and its power in shaping students' perceptions of the cyber world and interpersonal relationships.

While highlighting the importance of school actors, news articles discussed more about schools' failure to take on their responsibilities. For example, in a talk with a police officer and the mother of a cyberbullying victim Dawn-Marie, the mother talked about the role of school in the incident: "Personally? I believe the school knew. Do I believe that? She told the school, I do. Do I believe the school did their part? No" ("Beyond The Schoolyard", 2008, para 37). Similarly, cyberbullying expert Joanne Kates indicated that parents blamed schools for not intervening and providing support to children:

The parents always call back and say the same thing: The teacher made nice noises but won't take action. I tell them to up the ante and go see the principal. The parents call back after that meeting and I hear the same story (Kates, 2006, para 4).

This sense of blame is especially evident after the suicides of Rehtaeh Parsons and Amanda Todd. As one news article pointed out:

Why did Rehtaeh Parsons need to leave her high school? Did the principal make attempts to contact the mother, to talk it through, to find out if the girl should or would stay?

Shouldn't the suspects have to leave, rather than the alleged victim, while the matter is under investigation? We do know that the schools did not always ask the right questions and respond with humanity ("Why did Rehtaeh Parsons have to leave her high school?", 2013, para 1, 3, 7).

Similarly, about the death of Amanda Todd, a research associate with the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre asked "Why have school authorities – teachers, principals – not been actively intervening in bullying incidents to date using the tools they already have?" (Walton, 2012, para 16). In other words, schools have been viewed as a key actor in helping children prevent cyberbullying, but there seems to be a lack of actual actions from schools.

According to news articles being collected, the failure of schools to take action is associated with the ambiguous jurisdiction of schools when dealing with issues of cyberbullying. As mentioned in the previous chapter, cyberbullying can take place anywhere. Students may become victims of cyberbullying when they are away from school. Therefore, it raises the question of whether schools have the jurisdiction to intervene in cyberbullying incidents that occur outside of schoolyards. Alberta School Boards Association president Heather Welwood mentioned that "there are also jurisdictional issues for school boards to consider before acting on incidents that occur outside school hours or off school grounds" (Fitzpatrick, & McGinnis, 2008, para 26). Moreover, some news articles pointed out that this uncertainty of jurisdiction renders schools shift their responsibility when cyberbullying does not take place at schools. In one article, a parent complained that she had talked to the school principal about her child being repeatedly cyberbullied, but "the principal's response was that it was outside the school's jurisdiction" (Kates, 2006, para 5). Similarly, Shaheen Shariff, a

specialist in education and law at McGill University, mentioned that:

There is an onus there, and some of the schools aren't acknowledging it. They're feeling, well, if it happens on the weekend or it happens at home on a home computer, then it's the parents' responsibility. There are the web providers as well. They bring in the freedom of expression restrictions (Schmidt, 2005, para 15).

Simply speaking, news articles collected in this research highlighted problems that schools have been facing when dealing with cyberbullying. Schools are reluctant to take responsibility for their students' behaviors when they are outside of the schoolyard. However, on the other hand, similar to parents, schools have been viewed as obligated to support their students in the situation of cyberbullying. As one news article mentioned, "Parents and teachers need to work together, as young people look to both for guidance on a variety of Internet issues" (MediaSmarts, 2015, para 9).

## **6.5 Institutions**

While individual responsibilities have been a main frame in these collected news articles, the data also discussed the solutions beyond the individual level. Specifically, the news articles that I collected have established a disproportionate focus on legal remedies, giving a sense that the problem of cyberbullying tends to be first and foremost understood as a matter of law. The observed or implied idea is also that the public tends to seek legal services to deal with cyberbullying. This directly touches on the question of the criminalization of cyberbullying, a subject that has raised many debates in the field. The central arguments surrounding these debates related to an irreconcilable tension between social control and freedom of speech. On the one hand, some individuals ask for supervision of students'

behavior, such as criminalizing cyberbullying. On the other hand, some argue the importance of freedom of speech, and the criminalization of cyberbullying will invade individuals' rights of freedom. In the following sections, I will discuss how the collected news articles frame the responsibility of institutions.

In the data, the first question that emerges concerns whether forms of control should be further invested or developed or not. Some news articles argued that there are already laws available to deal with cyberbullying and that there is no need to create specific cyberbullying laws. As Michael Deturbide, a law professor and associate dean at Dalhousie University, stated, "The most severe forms of cyberbullying are already captured in the Criminal Code" (Bourgon, 2008, para 12). For instance, "it's already illegal to harass anyone to the point where they fear for their safety" and "to spread false rumors that can lead to defamatory action" (Bourgon, 2008, para 13). Similarly, in an article discussing the Canadian Teachers Federation's demand for amending the Criminal Code for cyberbullying, the author argued that "the Criminal Code already contains all the resources needed to prosecute bullying in its many varieties. These resources include provisions for crimes of harassment and uttering threats" ("Cyberbullying laws already exist", 2008, para 4). The author further pointed out that "it is incumbent upon parents, teachers, and others who work with children to press charges using the avenues of existing legislation" ("Cyberbullying laws already exist", 2008, para 4). In other words, there are adequate sections in laws that can be used to hold someone accountable for their cyberbullying behaviors, but it is up to individuals to make full use of it. The focus is transferred on how actors could or should be taking action in light of what already exists. As Shaheen Shariff, an associate professor of education at McGill University,

emphasized, "the legal remedies are already in place in the Criminal Code; they should be utilized without further need for special amendment" ("Cyberbullying laws already exist", 2008, para 8). Similarly, in an article criticizing Nova Scotia's Cyber-Safety Act in 2013, the author indicated that:

Most of the laws, at the time of the Parsons' incident in 2011, were already there. The investigation was simply hindered by conflicting reports, or as the family alleges, investigators who didn't take the situation seriously enough. It wasn't because police didn't have the necessary laws (Urback, 2013, para 7).

In other words, some news articles have viewed current legal services as adequate in dealing with cyberbullying, and there is no need to criminalize cyberbullying further.

Another reason against further social control and the idea of criminalizing cyberbullying, as presented by some news articles, is the vagueness of the term "cyberbullying." It is too broad that it may criminalize free expression. Canada has placed a high value on freedom of expression as a constitutional right. As Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in one news article, "freedom of expression, freedom of speech, is so fundamental to our democracies that ... as soon as we say we have to limit hate speech, we have to protect citizens" (Selley, 2019, para 2). Also, law professor Michael Deturbide stated that "we do have freedom of expression in Canada and that means sometimes you can say unpopular and even nasty things" (Bourgon, 2008, para 15). In other words, freedom of expression means that individuals are allowed to say things that make others feel upset or disagreeable. But this also brings into debate and reflection on the kinds of harms that should be tolerated or not in the best interest of the whole, of a particular society, where to draw the

line, and how to implement or react when the threshold is stepped over.

The problem with the criminalization of cyberbullying is that the line between legal and illegal, free speech and cyberbullying is blurred. "It would be difficult for lawmakers to know where to draw the line" (Bourgon, 2008, para 11). As one article mentioned, "bullying is a broad term that could encompass everything from insults to threats of bodily harm" ("Be clear on cyberbullying", 2009, para 2). Specific examples also raise the challenge of doing so when people say that they are joking, or in the context of anonymity. In one article, the author attacked Nova Scotia's cyberbullying law and stated that "Nova Scotia has just used its good intentions to venture down the path to hell. They've made pretty much everyone a potential criminal." (Furey, 2013, para 1). For example:

If you goad someone to post a judgmental tweet or Facebook comment about someone, who in turn feels a little sad about it, you can have your Internet shut down for a year.

You might even have to cough over cash to that person -- as the act permits the awarding of damages (Furey, 2013, para 8).

In other words, some actors argue that specific uses of the term cyberbullying could potentially turn all speech into a crime. As one article mentioned, cyberbullying legislation "is going to be pushed to its limits – where it will run right smack into the Charter of Rights and Freedoms" ("Nova Scotia's cyberbullying law", 2014, para 6). The reason, as a lawyer stated in an article discussing the drafting of anti-cyberbullying law in response to Rehtaeh Parsons case, "it is too broad and allows anything online that hurts somebody's feelings to be considered an offence" (Doucette, 2015, para 1). Simply speaking, in order to criminalize cyberbullying, lawmakers have to be extremely careful not to cross the line of "freedom of

expression." However, as discussed above, drawing a clear line between legal and illegal speech is almost impossible.

Along the same lines, some news articles suggested solving the conflict between the criminalization of cyberbullying and certain constitutional rights by "narrow[ing] the scope so that it targets only malicious use of the Internet" ("Crack down cautiously", 2013, para 9). However, the general message that news articles convey is that it is difficult (if not impossible) to create a workable cyberbullying law. As one article indicated:

Any law dealing with cyberbullying and, therefore, conduct relating to the vagaries of the psyche and human emotion, would at best be ineffective. At worst, it would be struck down as unconstitutional, as laws require "bright lines" so that individuals know when they are onside and offside of them (Lungu, 2013, para 8).

Specifically, this news article pointed out that cyberbullying mainly relates to actions that cause psychological harm, which usually concern subjective and personal questions that are usually not "easily measured or assessed on any recognizable legal standard" (Lungu, 2013, para 6). In other words, laws have limitations, and they cannot solve subjective and personal problems.

Expanding this idea, as another news article indicated "government isn't qualified to judge the real psychological abuse a victim takes when being bullied" (Di Massa, 2014, para 11). Simply speaking, the conflicts between cyberbullying legislation and constitutional rights cannot be eliminated. Because of this, several news articles suggested that laws should only criminalize the most severe types of cyberbullying, which relate to threats of bodily harm ("Be clear on cyberbullying", 2009 & "If Cyber-safety Act is worth the price", 2013). As

discussed earlier, "the most severe forms of cyberbullying are already captured in the Criminal Code" (Bourgon, 2008, para 12). Therefore, the debate goes back to the idea that existing laws are adequate for dealing with cyberbullying. If conduct cannot be dealt with under existing laws, creating a specific cyberbullying law will not likely solve the problem.

Several news articles indicated that rather than addressing the issue of cyberbullying directly, cyberbullying legislation should expand the government's surveillance power – which further ties into the idea of social control. For example, Cyber-safety Act has been described by one news article as aggressive and intrusive, as it contains search-and-seizure sections that allow the government to enter the alleged bullies' homes, take their computers and cellphones away, and obtain all their texts ("If Cyber-safety Act is worth the price", 2013). Moreover, several news articles criticized Bill C-13, the Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act, for granting the police and government surveillance powers. As one news article pointed out, there are only a few clauses related to cyberbullying, and beyond that, the whole bill is about empowering the government and police to investigate citizens' personal information. For example, carriers can disclose customer information without legal consequences. Authorities gain more access to individuals' data (El akkad, 2013). Similarly, another news article pointed out that:

The bill 'streamlines' the process of obtaining warrants to intercept private communications, enables the tracking of individuals and transactions if a crime is suspected, and expands police wiretapping powers from telephone data to all types of telecommunications (Roher, 2014, para 7).

Simply speaking, the creation of specific cyberbullying laws has little contribution to the prevention of cyberbullying; it will only enhance police and government powers to access citizen's personal information. This is another concern raised by actors participating in this discussion.

Overall, the opposition to new cyberbullying legislation centers on its ineffectiveness in addressing the problem and the negative consequences it will bring to individuals and the justice system. When Federal Justice Minister Peter MacKay was asked how some of those sections under Bill C-13 have anything to do with cyberbullying, MacKay said that "it is a crime that 'really knows no borders'" (Roher, 2014, para 10). Ironically, this captured the central problem of the term "cyberbullying"—it is a "crime" that has no borders. It covers a wide range of behaviors, intent is difficult to document, and consequences can be somewhat different for different people. Everything, every speech, or every conduct can potentially be viewed as cyberbullying – some argue. As discussed above, the criminalization of cyberbullying would make everyone a potential criminal. It is attempting to measure something unmeasurable by legal standards—a person's personal feelings, which are outside the realm of legal standards. More importantly, cyberbullying legislation will be bound to challenge other constitutional rights, such as freedom of expression. Therefore, lawmakers have to be very careful when deciding on cyberbullying legislation. As one article stressed, we must "enact a law that will last" ("Crack down cautiously", 2013, para 10).

On the other hand, some news articles called for the creation of specific cyberbullying laws because existing laws are not adequate in dealing with cyberbullying. Although current laws already contain sections that can deal with this issue, advocates for cyberbullying laws

pointed out that the constant occurrence of cyberbullying incidents demonstrated that existing laws have failed to help victims of cyberbullying. The two most prominent examples are the suicides of Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons. For example, one news article mentioned that the tragedy of Amanda Todd "reaffirmed the magnitude of this issue and the lack of efficient tools to punish and deter cyberbullying" (Urosevic, 2013, para 1).

Similarly, in response to Rehtaeh Parsons's suicide, the family blamed the justice system for "failing" their daughter. As the mother mentioned, her daughter became everyone's target and was called derogatory terms, and the police conducted a year-long investigation but did not charge anyone ("Nova Scotia bully case", 2013). On the Facebook page, one post questioned, "What is wrong with our society when a girl/woman is victimized and SHE is shunned!!" ("Nova Scotia bully case", 2013, para 23). Another post stressed, "Clearly the justice system failed her, society failed her, the school system failed her, the mental health system failed her" ("Nova Scotia bully case", 2013, para 25). In other words, when a child was targeted by a large group of students at school and online, the existing legislation did not in any way help the victim. Similarly, another article stated that "it is doubly shocking that no charges were laid in the alleged gang rape of Rehtaeh Parsons" (Kheiriddin, 2013, para 11).

While opponents of cyberbullying laws claimed that individuals can use the section on harassment to deal with cyberbullying incidents, Rehtaeh Parsons's case is one example where that did not seem to work. This helps to understand why, for those who advocate in favour of specific cyberbullying laws, there must be changes in laws. One news article stated that "bullies should face criminal consequences" (Doucette, 2013, para 11). Similarly, a law professor at Dalhousie University, Wayne MacKay, said, "there needs to be a clear delineation

of consequences for bullies as well as an arms-length body that would monitor the government's progress on bullying" (Doucette, 2013, para 9). Although it is not easy to construct a new law, the government should put effort into creating it. They have to try because the action of creating cyberbullying laws sends the public a message that this is a serious issue and there are consequences for cyberbullying others. As Wayne MacKay indicated, "at a symbolic level, I think the law has an important role - it tells you what you think is important and what needs to be addressed" (Keller, 2012, para 26).

Moreover, another article emphasized that "Rehtaeh's suicide reminds us that while we may never be able to fully eradicate bullying, we have to continue to try - in ways that will actually make a difference" (Kheiriddin, 2013, para 12). In other words, different from opponents of cyberbullying laws who emphasize the problem or impossibility of criminalizing cyberbullying, advocates suggest that the government should try. Even though the problem of cyberbullying may never be removed from society, it is the government's responsibility to take action and look for ways to reduce it.

While opponents of specific cyberbullying laws pointed out the problem of violating individuals' constitutional rights, some advocates argue that preventing cyberbullying should outweigh other rights in situations of serious cyberbullying. As one victim mentioned, "As someone who has been bullied for 11-12 years, I'm not sure how you can express yourself through bullying" (Bourgon, 2008, para 19). Furthermore, with respect to concerns raised by Bill C-13, Rehtaeh Parsons's father indicated that:

I respect privacy as much as any Canadian ... however, I believe Bill C-13 is not about an invasion of privacy, it's about allowing police officers to effectively address the many

challenges of instant mass communication and abuse (Pedwell, 2014, para 7).

Overall, news articles presented the legal services available to deal with cyberbullying. However, these current legal remedies have been regarded as inadequate in regulating and preventing cyberbullying. There is a need to create specific cyberbullying laws. The problem is that it is nearly impossible to criminalize all forms of cyberbullying due to the broadness of this term. By making cyberbullying an offense, the government and lawmakers will face constitutional issues, such as freedom of expression and the right to privacy. To date, it remains a challenge for governments and policymakers to create better legal services to deal with cyberbullying.

## **Chapter 7: Discussion**

In Chong and Druckman's (2007) research on framing and opinion formation in competitive environments, the researchers pointed out that the main message conveyed by framing theories is that there can be multiple, even competing frames on one issue, and it can be constructed differently through the process of transferring information. My research findings coincide with this notion, as there are multiple and different frames on the issue of cyberbullying. In this section, I will first discuss the multiple constructions of cyberbullying as a social problem by different actors. After that, I will discuss how online news articles framed different actors' responsibilities in dealing with this issue. In particular, how the mainstream media emphasizes individual responsibilities rather than societal responsibilities. Furthermore, news articles' highlights on the unique technological features of cyberbullying will be discussed.

### **7.1 Defining cyberbullying**

One important finding from my research is that there has been no consensus on the definition of cyberbullying. Such uncertainty coincides with social problem theories, which assume that a social problem does not exist naturally, but rather is the creation of individuals (Fuller & Myers, 1941; Michailakis & Schirmer, 2014; Isaacs, 2021). As mentioned earlier, scholars like Fuller and Myers (1941), and Lauer (1976) believed that a social problem exists only when individuals living in the condition perceive the condition as problematic. Therefore, what a definition of cyberbullying reflects is how the specific actors perceive this issue. Parents, schools and governments depict cyberbullying differently because they perceive the condition of cyberbullying from their own position and perspectives. This is also in line with

Guba and Lincoln (2003)'s notion on the constructivism approach, which suggests that realities are produced through multiple social constructions, and there is a need to reconstruct "previously held constructions" (p. 112). The vagueness of the meaning of cyberbullying found in my data implies the need for a reconstruction of cyberbullying as a social problem.

No matter how subtle the differences among various definitions on cyberbullying, the existence of uncertainty can raise various issues. As one news article indicated, broadness and vagueness can cause the term cyberbullying to be misused (Furey, 2013). However, as discussed by various actors, the vagueness of the definition of cyberbullying is unsolvable. The term cyberbullying will always cover a wide range of behaviors. Therefore, some scholars argue that maybe there is no need to define cyberbullying. According to Schott (2014), "it is neither desirable nor possible to develop a definition of bullying that is universally valid or final" (p. 24). It is a complex social phenomenon, not just a form of individual aggression, or social violence, or dysfunctional group dynamics. There are also challenges posed by language differences and cultural differences in terms of understanding bullying. For example, several research projects demonstrated that children and young adults, and children between different ages tend to define bullying differently (Campbell & Xu, 2022). Furthermore, as reflected in both the literature review and the news articles being collected in this research, current definitions on cyberbullying do not cover children's opinions on the meaning of cyberbullying. Children's experiences of cyberbullying cannot be fully recognized under definitions of cyberbullying (Kofoed & Staksrud, 2019). Moreover, in an Australian study on parents' understandings of their children's experiences of online negative interactions, the results indicated that parents' perception of what constitutes

cyberbullying differs from what the definitions presented (Jeffery, 2022).

Simply speaking, there has been no universal agreement on how to define cyberbullying. As my data indicates, definitions of cyberbullying have been changing overtime, and actors who participated in the process of construction could not reach an agreement with the definition of cyberbullying. This finding is central to my research because it is an indication that no matter how different actors try to define or create policies on this issue, there might always be disagreement. Therefore, there needs a bottom-up approach to view this phenomenon, to define it in a flexible, and context-dependent way (Schott, 2014). As Canty, Stubbe, Steers and Collings (2016) suggested, the solution is to either abandon the definitions on bullying altogether, or, to deconstruct it and develop “a range of terms that explicate troublesome behaviours rather than subsuming them under the ‘bullying’ umbrella” (Canty, Stubbe, Steers & Collings, 2016, p.55). For future studies, rather than searching for a universal definition on cyberbullying, researchers need to re-examine the process of constructing cyberbullying and explore how cyberbullying can be deconstructed into other behaviors.

Moreover, actors involved in the process of constructing cyberbullying have not participated equally. Some actors’ voices tend to be presented more in mainstream media than others. For example, the collected online newspapers portrayed governments and policy-makers’ views on this issue more than other actors.

It is also noteworthy that there has been a lack of presentation of children’s definition of cyberbullying, which is an important finding, as cyberbullying tends to involve children and I initially wanted to study children’s perspectives on cyberbullying.

## 7.2 Cyberbullying, online harassment and criminal harassment

Specific to the definition issue, it is worth mentioning that the term online harassment has been used interchangeably with cyberbullying. The problem with considering cyberbullying as online harassment is that there has been no clear description for online harassment either. The only clear definition presented in news articles is the definition of criminal harassment under the Criminal Code. Based on the definition of criminal harassment under the *Criminal Code* (1985), online conducts that constitute harassment include “repeatedly communicating with, either directly or indirectly, the other person or anyone known to them”, and these conducts “causes that other person reasonably, in all the circumstances, to fear for their safety or the safety of anyone known to them” (C264). However, as argued by some news articles, rather than causing someone to fear their safety, “most instances of cyberbullying involve conduct that is intended simply to insult and humiliate the target or diminish them in the eyes of others” (Lungu, 2013, para 5). Simply speaking, criminal harassment and cyberbullying differ from each other in the aspect of causing fear of safety. This is in line with existing studies on the definition of cyberbullying. Despite the differences between definitions, there has been no definition on cyberbullying requiring the “cause others to fear for their safety” element (e.g., Peter & Petermann, 2018; Ansary, 2020; Santre, 2023).

In terms of the relationship between criminal harassment and online harassment, news articles tend to view online harassment as distinct from criminal harassment. The “online” or “cyber” component has rendered a great difference between them. In one news article, the mother of a 13-year-old girl complained of harassment to the police in Winnipeg about the

serious cyberbullying her daughter had suffered from. However, the mother was told that “there's no laws’ against the online harassment” (Giroday, 2010, para 10). Specifically, the police said that “these types of investigations are... a little bit more complex because obviously we're dealing with the Internet, and we're dealing with social networking, and it's not as cut and dried”(Giroday, 2010, para 18). Similarly, existing research on online harassment has been discussing it more as an emerging online problem rather than criminal harassment (Slaughter & Newman, 2022; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2007; Blackwell, Dimond, Schoenebeck & Lampe, 2017; Mitchell, Ybarra, Jones & Espelage, 2016). Simply speaking, online harassment is different from harassment under the Criminal Code. It is better understood as a distinct problem taking place online.

By considering online harassment as a distinct problem, there is a need to clarify what online harassment is before it can be used to define cyberbullying. However, the findings of previous research indicated that there has been no standard definition on online harassment and there has been an over-reliance on studies of bullying to define online harassment (Slaughter & Newman, 2022; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2007). In Slaughter and Newman’s (2022) study on how to measure online harassment, the researchers pointed out that definitions on online harassment have been largely derived from studies of bullying and cyberbullying. However, parts of the definitions of bullying (such as the intent of the perpetrator and the repetition of behaviors) have been inappropriate for the understanding and measurement of online harassment. Furthermore, researchers proposed their definition of online harassment -- “interpersonal aggression or offensive behavior(s) that is communicated over the Internet or through other electronic media” (p. 1). Similarly, Mitchell, Ybarra, Jones

and Espelage's study (2016) emphasized that research on online harassment should focus more on the impact and outcomes of online harassment instead of trying to fit in with the definition of bullying, as some youth's experience of harassment differs from the criteria under bullying. Simply speaking, there has been no clear definition of online harassment. Online harassment has been largely defined based on the term bullying. However, research indicated that individuals' experience with online harassment differs from the criteria adopted from definitions of bullying. Given the uncertainty of online harassment, and the similarity between bullying and traditional bullying, it will be inappropriate to define cyberbullying based on online harassment. It will only create uncertainty. For future studies, researchers could investigate more into the definition of online harassment and explore various types of online behaviors that may not be included in the term cyberbullying. As Mitchell, Ybarra, Jones and Espelage (2016) suggested, researchers need to consider the necessity of creating "new terms to identify incidents that are equally or more upsetting to youth as bullying, but do not fall under the classic definition" (p. 293).

Overall, the vagueness or broadness of definitions on cyberbullying calls for a reconstruction of cyberbullying as a problem. The concept of cyberbullying is dynamic. It changes based on contexts and the definition has to take into account individuals' experiences with this phenomenon. Furthermore, researchers need to realize that the term cyberbullying can be an umbrella term for various online behaviors. In order to cover as many online behaviors as possible, researchers can also deconstruct cyberbullying and build a series of new terms. In other words, instead of identifying most online behaviors like cyberbullying, those behaviors can also be viewed as some other online problems.

### 7.3 Framing cyberbullying

According to Entman (1993), frames can “define problems”, “diagnose causes”, “make moral judgments”, and “suggest remedies” (p. 52). In other words, frames affect how an issue is viewed, and analyzed, as well as how it will be treated. The frames function by making certain information in the text salient (Entman, 1993). As reflected in the news articles I collected, one of the most salient pieces of information was about individual victims or cyberbullies. For example, between 2012 and 2013, most of the news articles were discussing the suicide of Amanda Todd. In other periods, the news articles were often related to students’ problematic online behaviors, or some stories of victims of cyberbullying. In other words, when news articles discuss cyberbullying, the focus is on individuals themselves. This finding coincides with some previous research on the causes and responsibilities of cyberbullying. For example, in research on how American news media frames the causes and responsibilities of bullying, Kim and Telleen (2017) found that newspapers and television news emphasized the individual-level causes (victims and bullies) rather than societal level. Similarly, Milosevic’s research on the mainstream U.S. media’s frames on cyberbullying indicated that TV coverage’s stories on cyberbullying largely focused on cyberbullying incidents, which assign great responsibilities on individuals who participated in these incidents (Milosevic, 2015). In other words, individuals involved in cyberbullying incidents have been viewed as the cause of the problem.

Moreover, news articles’ emphasis on the unique features of cyberbullying also reflects that news media tends to frame cyberbullying as an individual issue. The unique features of cyberbullying are anonymity, no restrictions on time and space, and an unbounded number of

audiences. These features are all connected with individuals, and individual actions or behaviors are affected by these features. As Milosevic (2015) pointed out, anonymity assists cyberbullying by encouraging individuals to do things they would not normally do. Simply speaking, technology-enabled individuals' cyberbullying actions.

In terms of responsibilities, news frames had a focus on individual-level responsibilities. Specifically, news articles framed parents and teachers as the main actors responsible for protecting children from cyberbullying. As discussed in the analysis chapter, newspapers emphasized parents' irreplaceable role in teaching children how to use communication technologies properly. "If we teach our children how to safely cross the street, we ought also to teach them to safely navigate the web" ("Practising safe surfing", 2008, para 6). Similarly, teachers were also seen as playing the crucial role in educating children. As one article mentioned, "the solution, ironically, lies in the classrooms where the teachers educate the children, including the cyberbullies" ("Teach cyberbullies", 2008, para 7). In other words, news articles tend to diminish governments and lawmakers' responsibilities by framing cyberbullying as a free-speech issue, which poses great challenges on criminalizing cyberbullying. In Chong and Druckman's (2007) research on framing in competitive elite environments, researchers indicated that "public opinion often depends on how elites choose to frame issues" (p. 99). An example is that the public's view on the Ku Klux Klan is associated with whether it is framed as free-speech issue or a public safety issue. How an issue is described has been an essential factor for framing effect (Chong & Druckman, 2007). In my research, a substantial amount of news articles debated whether cyberbullying should be criminalized, and the main problem raised is individuals' freedom of speech. "Freedom of

expression, freedom of speech, is so fundamental to our democracies that ... as soon as we say we have to limit hate speech, we have to protect citizens"(Selley, 2019, para 2). "It is too broad and allows anything online that hurts somebody's feelings to be considered an offence" (Doucette, 2015, para 1). Simply speaking, once news articles frame cyberbullying as a free-speech issue, it will be a great challenge for governments and lawmakers to act.

#### **7.4 Responsibilities frames**

Based on the two analysis chapters, cyberbullying has been regarded more as a moral problem than a legal one. Specifically, the collected news articles indicate that cyberbullying is the result of anonymity, which refrains children from real-life moral standards. Moreover, some news articles also mentioned the Internet is just a mirror to reflect the real social issues in society. Therefore, the solution for cyberbullying lies in the moral education of children. As suggested by the news articles, the moral education of children is mostly the responsibility of schools and parents. These two types of actors have been viewed as ones that children spend most time with. They therefore, need to monitor children and teach them the proper use of the Internet.

On the other hand, the news articles also mentioned the responsibilities of the lawmakers. According to the analysis, there are both advocates and opponents of the criminalization of cyberbullying. Individuals who are against the creation of specific cyberbullying law emphasized that existing legislation is enough to deal with cyberbullying issues. Also, criminalizing cyberbullying will inevitably touch upon the freedom of expression. And so far, there does not seem to be a solution for such conflict. In other words, laws cannot

be the sole solution to cyberbullying as a social issue. As mentioned in several news articles, dealing with cyberbullying needs the whole society to mobilize.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

Cyberbullying has been studied for more than 20 years. Its definition, prevalence, impacts, and possible solutions have all been discussed and researched. However, so far, individuals' understanding of cyberbullying still seems vague. Specifically, there has been no unified definition on cyberbullying, which also leads to the variation in measuring cyberbullying. And because of the lack of consensus on definition and the under-report of cyberbullying incidents, the prevalence of cyberbullying also varies from study to study. In terms of the impacts of cyberbullying, despite media's extensive reports on suicide cases related to cyberbullying, the relationship between cyberbullying and suicide remains unclear. However, studies do show that cyberbullying has negative effects on individuals' mental health. What's more, while there have been numerous studies on the prevention of cyberbullying, so far, there seems to be no effective method to deal with this issue. Some argue that existing laws are inadequate in addressing cyberbullying. However, creating new laws against cyberbullying raised more debates on the balance between individual rights and social control. In addition to legal responses, there are also suggestions for community-level prevention and the role of individual responsibilities. However, the effectiveness of different interventions remains unknown. In other words, current literature on cyberbullying implies the lack of knowledge on cyberbullying. There is a need for further studies on the issue of cyberbullying.

Current research has investigated how cyberbullying is constructed as a social problem in Canadian news media. The results indicated that there has been no consensus about what the problem is. It depends on various actors involved in the issue to define it. Such uncertainty

of the definition on cyberbullying suggests a reconstruction of the phenomenon of cyberbullying. In terms of the causes of cyberbullying, news articles highlighted three causes, (1) online disinhibition, (2) lack of supervision, and (3) deeper social issues. The first two causes linked cyberbullying with individual problems, which implies the solution lies in individuals taking responsibilities of themselves and parents supervising their children. The third cause focuses more on the problem of the society itself. In this view, cyberbullying is a mere reflection of deeper social issues.

In the analysis of responsibility frame, results indicated that cyberbullying tends to be seen as a moral issue that requires education rather than a legal issue. The extensive discussions of legal responses to cyberbullying suggested that cyberbullying is not a problem that can be easily dealt with through legislation. Instead, the solution lies in education. Such education needs the collaboration of parents, schools, experts, bystanders and individuals themselves.

### **Limitations**

The current research has some limitations. First of all, due to the restriction of time, the sample did not include all the articles that were found. Considering more news articles might prove interesting to see if other themes emerge. Specifically, I would like to see if there are other causes and solutions for cyberbullying. Also, my research did not consider the difference between anglophone and francophone news media as well as the social and political positions of newspaper publishers. In the future, if possible, I would like to investigate how these factors may influence findings, on top of looking at similar media outside of Canada. Last but not least, my research did not analyze in depth how discourse

around cyberbullying has shifted over time. If there is an opportunity for further study, I would like to examine the temporal shifts of this issue.

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