

Public Opinion on Cyber-Bullying Laws in Canada

by

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## **Abstract**

The proliferation of the Internet raises concern over the misuse and abuse of information and communication technology. A downside to the rapid adoption of hyper-connectivity is the potential danger resulting from the use of technology and the Internet. The bulk of cyber-bullying literature often overlooks how relationships are constructed, maintained, and policed over new technological platforms. This study attempts to understand whether the public perceives cyber-bullying as a problem, whether they feel stakeholders are taking sufficient action against cyber-bullying; and, finally whether they feel special laws should be introduced to deal specifically with cyber-bullying. Through a random digit survey, data was collected from twenty participants residing in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada. The results of this study reveal that the participants trust certain stakeholders to take cyber-bullying seriously (e.g. mental health professionals), but remain unconvinced regarding the seriousness of politicians. The study suggests that a lack of clarity in definition, prevalence, and legislation has the potential to hamper and/or confuse the public's understanding of what constitutes cyber-bullying.

**Keywords:** cyber-bullying, laws, Internet, youth, fear of technology, fear of cyber-bullying

## **Dedication**

To my family and husband, words cannot describe what it feels like to be at the finish line. Your loving words gave me the drive and motivation to persevere. Throughout this process, I have learned how important it is to believe in yourself and to never give up. Love you all!

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
<b>Chapter One: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Review of Literature.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Cyber-Bullying Literature.....	11
Definitions.....	11
Prevalence Rates.....	15
Methodologies.....	18
Framing and Blaming: Moral Panics and Youth Culture.....	20
Legislation on Cyber-Bullying.....	25
<b>Chapter Three: Method.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Results.....</b>	<b>40</b>
Demographics.....	40
Is Cyber-Bullying a Problem?.....	41
Are Stakeholders Taking Sufficient Action?.....	48
Should Special Laws be Introduced?.....	52
<b>Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions.....</b>	<b>59</b>
Overview of Findings.....	59
Cyber-Bullying as a Problem.....	60
Stakeholders' Response to Cyber-Bullying.....	60
Special Laws Against Cyber-Bullying.....	61
Contribution to Literature.....	62
Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research.....	65
Concluding Remarks.....	68
References.....	69
Appendix A: Survey Instrument.....	78

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The literature on cyber-bullying has produced three main findings. First, cyber-bullying appears to be of great concern to members of today's society (Miller, 2012; Bauman, 2013; Bishop, 2013; Festl, Scharnow, & Quandt, 2013). Second, cyber-bullying is framed as a serious issue impacting today's youth (Davies & Lee, 2008; Cassidy et al., 2009; Li, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Addington, 2013). Third, victims of traditional bullying and cyber-bullying can suffer negative physical and psychological consequences (Colley & Maltby, 2007; Craig & Pepler, 2007; Hopkins et al., 2012; Lindsay & Krysik, 2012; Sticca & Perren, 2013). Cyber-bullying is often framed as a phase within one's youth, a phase that quickly emerges as quickly as it may dissipate. However, for victims of cyber-bullying, including those both young and old, the consequences of cyber-bullying warrants a deeper and more critical investigation across all demographics.

Mounting concern over the misuse and abuse of information and communication technology has alerted stakeholders, including parents, educators, law enforcement, community services, and the legal apparatus, as to what appropriate action should be taken. Cyber-bullying challenges traditional forms of crime detection and law enforcement. This occurs because the concept of cyber-bullying, and what behaviours should be considered cyber-bullying, takes on different meaning for different individuals. An inconsistent definition of cyber-bullying has the potential to produce local and international implications. For these implications, the question becomes what parameters should be established in response to cyber-bullying and who is responsible for preventing cyber-bullying?

Although these unanswered questions persist, considerable effort has been made to further expand the literature on cyber-bullying (Yar, 2005; Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009;

Patchin & Hinduja, 2011; Cesaroni, Downing, & Alvi, 2012; Bonanno & Hymel, 2013). Cyber abuse is conceptualized as an umbrella term to include “online abusive interpersonal behaviors including online bullying, stalking, sexual solicitation, and problematic exposure to pornography” (Mishna et al., 2011, p. 5). As a result, cyber-bullying is ‘electronic bullying or online social cruelty’ (Mishna et al., 2011, p. 5) with the intent of ‘willful and repeated harm’ (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010, p. 615) *vis-à-vis* the infliction of threats, harassment, and embarrassment. Although the literature attempts to conceptualize cyber-criminality, a widely accepted definition of cybercrime does not exist (Finklea & Theohary, 2012). For Fukuchi (2011), the concepts “cyber-harassment,” “cyber-bullying,” and “cyber-stalking” are often used interchangeably.

Research has sought to verbalize and contextualize the cyber environment. The cyber environment can be illustrated as a community *vis-à-vis* a virtual community. A virtual community encompasses a shared set of interests, values, and sociability, all of which occurs on the Internet (Perry & Olsson, 2009). The Internet provides an outlet for individuals to “sense, listen, feel and be involved intimately” in culture-at-a-distance (Back, 2002, p. 629). Although the physical world is marked with borders and boundaries, the virtual realm is much different (Finklea & Theohary, 2012). Cyberworlds exist beyond physical and territorial boundaries, but these virtual communities and cities occupy a form of social space, frequented by diverse populations, including cyber-criminals (Wall & Williams, 2007; Williams, 2007). Cyber-bullying also occupies a form of social space; however, challenges the traditional crime-victim relationship. In particular, these crimes can occur in both the physical and digital domains (Finklea & Theohary, 2012).

Although cybercrimes share some common similarities with crimes of the real world, cyber-attackers can utilize the Internet on a limitless scale due to the speed and ease of abusing information and communication technology (Lipton, 2011). A scale of limitlessness challenges the ability to produce research on the cyber environment in a timely fashion, especially considering how quickly technology advances. For Bauman (2013), information on understanding the functioning and implications of technology ‘lags behind the current digital landscape’ as technology is constantly evolving (p. 249). As platforms and applications continue to advance and improve in technological capabilities, researchers struggle to match the speed and availability of digital technology (Bauman, 2013). When one considers the expansion of the digital world and digital communities, social networking platforms seem to proliferate at breakneck speeds. With this in mind, research on cyber-abuse, such as cyber-bullying, is becoming more widely investigated.

A few critical gaps in research emerge since previous research tends to focus on an alleged ‘new type of child-offender’ (Cesaroni et al., 2012, p. 199). In particular, these weaknesses include the problemization of youth culture as well as the subsequent regulation of youthfulness; neglect of wider social problems, such as homophobia, racism, and other problems transmitted from the real world to the digital world; and, lack of an interdisciplinary understanding of cyber-bullying, especially in the field of criminology and criminal justice policy. As a result, legislation and laws are developed without fully understanding how these weaknesses may produce severe implications for various key stakeholders as well as the public alike. Noteworthy examples include the criminal justice apparatus, policy-makers, and personnel in the education system, to name a few. Neglected from the current state of literature is the need



to instill a more positive experience for individuals who use emerging technological mediums (Cassidy et al., 2009).

Certainly, understanding the ways in which adolescents and young adults internalize cyber-bullying—from both an offender and victim perspective—will assist school administrators and teachers to enforce better policies and practices. However, cyber-bullying research tends to narrow in on a younger age demographic while little is known about what the public thinks about cyber-bullying. As research continues to gauge adolescents and students, adult fears and anxieties regarding the ‘acceleration of communication and information technologies’ remains neglected (Cesaroni et al., 2012, p. 199). Understanding adult fears and anxieties can reduce misconceptions about youth and youth culture. Eliminating misconceptions of youth is of particular importance considering the current language is framed around scapegoating youth as the “troublemakers.”

While the problematization of youth may result in a moral panic or an exaggeration of the bully-victim relationship, the conversation also neglects segments of the population who are more likely to experience victimization based on their demographic characteristics, such as young children, the disabled, or the elderly. This is especially important as Lipton (2011) reports that online victimization tends to disproportionately affect traditional subordinated segments of the population, such as women, children, and minorities. However, the focus narrows in on the technological device or medium without consideration of other equally important factors, such as sexism, racism, homophobia, and hate crime (Cesaroni et al., 2012). As there is push to problematize and dramatize youth culture, these weaknesses continue to ignore the importance of empowering victims to combat online abuses (Lipton, 2011).

The current state of cyber-bullying research lacks an interdisciplinary perspective. Cyber-bullying research is typically conducted in the fields of education and health sciences (Cesaroni et al., 2012). An interdisciplinary application encourages multiple epistemological and ontological approaches to the study of cyber-bullying. For example, an interdisciplinary approach allows for adapting traditional or contemporary criminological explanations of crime. New theories could be established to better understand the role of digital mediums on crime, deterrence, victimization, and crime prevention. Well-crafted concepts and measures are equally important as Addington (2013) suggests a “need for measures tailored to the cyber context to comprehensively test such models” (p. 454). Applying measures tailored to the cyber context, within a criminological perspective, will provide more robust research not only in the field of criminology, but also for other disciplines as well. There is a need for applying an interdisciplinary approach to our changing digital landscape.

The rapidly changing digital landscape produces growing concern regarding the role of legislation. Primarily, how the digital landscape should be policed and regulated. Further consideration is also warranted to address the scope and severity of cyber-bullying laws. The question becomes how comfortable or safe do users of technology feel when consuming a particular platform. The answer to this fundamental question could provide key stakeholders with an understanding of whether certain individuals fear technology, including a fear of victimization by using technological platforms. Further research is needed to deconstruct this fundamental relationship, particularly, at a time when technology appears to be moving faster than the ability to conceptualize these changes, construct policies concerning key issues arising from the rapid development of technology, and the ability to study the true impact of technology albeit the negatives and positives. While legislation strives to catch up to the proliferation of

technology, a key area of analysis requires understanding the fundamentals of cyber-bullying legislation, including the responsiveness of key stakeholders and the body of law governing cyber-bullying.

Cybercrime has received attention in national security agendas across the world (Wall & Williams, 2013). Internet users can operate under relative anonymity thereby challenging traditional modes of crime detection, such as a disruption of traditional jurisdictions tasked with crime prevention (Brenner, 2006). Finklea and Theohary (2012) highlight the challenges law enforcement personnel encounter when attempting to trace the perpetrator and to determine the source's level of threat, such as whether the incident is an isolated attack or whether the potential for greater harm is present. As cyber-attackers operate on an unprecedented scale, there is evidence of cross-border efforts to minimize the potential of incoming threats as part of the national security strategies of the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, and the Netherlands (Wall & Williams, 2013). These emerging areas of study, especially cross-border efforts to combat the growing problem, present an opportunity for criminologists to further understand the current state of research and policy in conjunction with government agendas (Wall & Williams, 2013).

The flexible flow of communication has made regulating cyber-space a daunting task (Levin & Goodrick, 2013). Although the federal government administers Canada's Constitution and *Criminal Code*, the enforcement of the *Criminal Code* occurs at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels (Levin & Goodrick, 2013). The *Criminal Code* addresses bullying and cyber-bullying in the following ways: criminal harassment (section 264); uttering threats (section 264.1); intimidation (subsection 423(1)); mischief in relation to data (subsection 430(1.1)); unauthorized use of computer (section 342.1); false messages, indecent or harassing telephone

calls (section 372); counselling suicide (section 241); defamatory libel (section 298-301); incitement of hatred (section 319); and child pornography (section 163.1). Each province and territory is responsible for monitoring bullying incidents. For example, Manitoba's *Public School Amendment Act* provides a definition of bullying and cyber-bullying and holds schools responsible for establishing and enforcing a respect-for-human-diversity policy; the *Accepting Schools Act* and *Education Act* in Ontario requires school boards to establish bullying prevention and intervention plans, including interventions and supports for students affected by bullying; and, Nova Scotia's *Promotion of Respectful and Responsible Relationships Act* requires codes of conduct and the data collection as well as monitoring of reported incidents in conjunction with enacting the *Cybersafety Act*, which is tasked with investigating complaints of cyber-bullying and the protection of victims (Department of Justice, 2013).

Bills have also been enacted to recognize and prevent cyber-crimes. In 2010, Bill C-51 was introduced to allow police to 'monitor and possibly capture criminal activity on the Internet' (Malone & Malone, 2013, p. 168). C-51 also granted the collection of "transmission data," such as the type of data, origin of data, and destination of the data (Malone & Malone, 2013). In 2012, Bill C-30 sought to expand judicial power relating to computer data, tracking and interception, and disclosure of subscriber data (Bailey, 2012). Although C-51 and C-30 are now dormant, Bill C-13 was recently introduced to prohibit the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, the procurement of electronic devices and communication technology, and granting police more power to identify, prevent, and criminalize cyber deviants (Public Safety Canada, 2013). Cause for concern is being raised as these bills continually push the boundaries of lawful access. These bills are often tabled as "omnibus bills" where unrelated measures—such as police interception, accessing e-mails without disclosure, and requiring ISPs to install surveillance equipment, to

name a few—are subtly added to one singular bill, including the ability to incorporate content from previously failed bills such as C-30 (CBC News, 2013a; CBC News, 2013b; Calgary Herald, 2014).

Great Britain employs the term “trolling” to account for ‘sending of provocative messages’ via electronic and communication platforms ‘for the entertainment of oneself, others, or both’ (Bishop, 2013, p. 302). In Great Britain, the *Telecommunications Act 1984* was the first act introduced to prohibit ‘grossly offensive, indecent or menacing messages through a communications platform’ (Bishop, 2013). Since the 1980s, the *Protection from Harassment Act 1997* explicitly criminalizes cyber-harassment and cyber-stalking incidents whereby the perpetrator would use communication services to harass others; the *Sexual Offences Act 2003* was amended to include sex offences online; the *Communications Act 2003* prohibited the improper use of a public communications network with a possible term of incarceration; the *Police and Justice Act 2006*, as an extension of the *Computer Misuse Act 1990*, tackled public concern over cyber-crimes as well as the preservation of online communities on behalf of its members, such as a denial of service attack or other computer abuses (Bishop, 2013).

The United States has launched, in response to cyber-bullying, a legal overhaul in the areas of the *Interstate Communications Act*; *Telephone Harassment Act*; *Interstate Stalking Punishment and Prevention Act*; *Computer Fraud and Abuse Act*; and, *Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act* (Lipton, 2011). Additionally, each state in the United States has differing causes of action and the imposition of punitive measures in response to cyber-stalking, cyber-bullying, and cyber-harassment laws (Fukuchi, 2011; NCSL, 2014)<sup>1</sup>. For minors, each

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<sup>1</sup> Fukuchi (2011) explains that in the United States, the terms cyber-harassment and cyber-stalking is typically applied to the adult population whereas cyber-bullying is applied to children, youth, and young adults.

state has varying cyber-bullying and bullying policies or a bullying policy that also contains a cyber-bullying element. For example, Colorado has laws against bullying, but lags behind for failing to enact cyber-bullying laws. Conversely, Arkansas school districts are equipped with cyber-harassment prevention policies alongside bullying policies. Each state varies in both the implementation of cyber-stalking and cyber-harassment laws or, in some cases, may have one or another. Overall, inconsistent laws make prosecuting and cross-border efforts extremely difficult.

Thus, cyber-bullying has become a focus of interest in the last few decades with the proliferation of the Internet. A number of legal frameworks have been employed to catch up to this rapid advancement of technology. However, the legal parameters enacted to detect and prevent cyber-bullying seemingly differ from one country to the next. Such an approach hints at the inability to construct and abide to a consistent definitional framework. Key stakeholders are then instructed to create policy and legislation. What occurs is the criminalization of ‘harmful’ online behaviours by holding users responsible for mitigating risk. Overall, the current response to online criminal activity is to identify, regulate, and establish a framework that deters, while simultaneously, criminalizes ‘harmful’ online behaviours (Cesaroni & Doob, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2011; Public Safety Canada, 2013).

Most notably absent from the conversation is how the public feels about key stakeholders and their ability to combat cyber-bullying. These gaps in research will be examined throughout this thesis *vis-à-vis* three primary research questions:

*RQ1: Does the public perceive cyber-bullying as a problem?*

*RQ2: Are stakeholders taking sufficient action against cyber-bullying?*

*RQ3: Should special laws be introduced to deal specifically with cyber-bullying?*

The changing technological landscape has the potential to produce significant social, political, and cultural implications. This thesis can contribute to the current state of literature by

expounding upon the public perception of cyber-bullying both locally and nationally. Consideration is paid to whether cyber-bullying should be regarded as a problem in one's country and community; whether cyber-bullying is viewed as a serious problem; whether stakeholders take cyber-bullying seriously and, if not, should stakeholders take more action; and, finally, whether special laws should be introduced to specifically target cyber-bullying cases in Canada. Steps are taken to broaden the focus away from a victim-offender relationship by placing additional emphasis on community cohesiveness. In this respect, public opinion not only provides a benchmark concerning the effectiveness of legislation, but also whether key stakeholders can be entrusted to combat cyber-bullying.

Before surveying the public on legislative practices against cyber-bullying, the next chapter seeks to explore what is known about cyber-bullying, including how cyber-bullying is problematized. The following chapter explores the current legislative framework employed against cyber-bullying, including research in the field.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Cyber-bullying Literature

**Definitions.** Statistics Canada (2011) estimates that eight out of ten Canadian households have access to the Internet. Gendron (2013) eloquently states, “An interconnected, knowledge-based society, Canada...[has] become increasingly dependent upon information and communication technologies” (p. 178). The digital realm blurs distant geographical locations and transforms our experience and perceptions of those locations at the click of a button. Physical space and time is also transformed with digitization. Although technology affords innovation and new discoveries, technology has also given rise to new forms of victimization.

First, an examination into traditional bullying will be made before transitioning into cyber-bullying. The scholarship tends to define traditional bullying as aggressive and intentional behaviour (Kowalski, Limber & Agatston, 2008; Mishna, 2012; Oppliger, 2013; Pepler et al., 2006; Solberg & Olweus, 2003; Thompson, Arora & Sharp, 2002). There are five types of traditional bullying: physical bullying, verbal bullying, gesture bullying, extortion bullying, and exclusion bullying (Thompson et al., 2002). Researchers have found that bullying can occur either directly or indirectly where the former includes face-to-face interaction and the latter involves malicious acts that occur without a confrontation (Sawyer, Mishna, Pepler & Wiener, 2011). Other scholarship observes bullying as an aggressive act that unfolds in relationships (Pepler et al., 2006). Pepler et al. (2006) regard bullying as a relationship problem as the bully asserts interpersonal power in these relationships by using aggression.

As the bully exerts aggressive and intentional behaviour, the bully attempts to capitalize on his or her ability to gain power over another. Kowalski et al. (2008) deconstruct the notion of a power imbalance, which typically—but not always—is repeated over time and can be used to



explain the helplessness that some victims may encounter. A power imbalance is not only confined to observable features, such as via physical strength or dominance, but may occur as a result of belonging to a different social status (Kowalski et al., 2008; Mishna, 2012). For some scholars, deconstructing the role of motivation can explain access to the victim in the first place. Thompson et al. (2002) argue that the type of aggression displayed by the bully is modified based on the type of motivation, reward, and feelings the bully seeks to fulfill. When the conditions motivate an individual to bully, the victim is less likely to defend one's self (Sawyer et al., 2011). The victim may be struggling with a power imbalance as well as a multitude of factors. The reason why an individual may choose to bully is complex and multi-faceted.

Internet users embrace a symbiotic relationship with information and communication technologies. Certainly, this relationship can take on both positive and negative elements. Cyber-bullying, also referred to as electronic bullying and online social cruelty, is conceptualized as bullying vis-à-vis the use of technology, such as via social networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), e-mail, chat rooms, on a website, cell phone text messaging and cameras, picture messages (including sexting), instant messaging systems, and online blogging communities (Addington, 2013; Li, 2006; Kowalski et al., 2008; Notar et al., 2013). Examples of cyber-bullying include: social ostracism; disparaging public comments; creation of hurtful or embarrassing content; sharing of confidential information; impersonation; sending harassing communications; and, name calling, ridiculing, and gossiping (Kirwan & Power, 2013). Evidently, the pro-bullying behaviours that occur on online networks can mimic the social networks that one observes in everyday life (Gane & Beer, 2008).

The rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT) has created new contexts for bullies to target and harass their victims (Elledge et al., 2013). However, the

scholarship tends to view cyber-bullying as sharing certain characteristics with traditional bullying (Li, 2006; Kowalski et al., 2008). Similar to traditional bullying, Patchin and Hinduja (2010) have found the act of cyber-bullying to be intentional, deliberate, and one that escalates over time. Kirwan and Power (2013) argue that traditional bullies may use this medium as part of a larger bullying strategy. In fact, Li (2006) postulates that cyber-bullying can take the form of stalking as well as the issuance of threats. Overall, cyber-bullying is viewed as a 'somewhat unique phenomenon' (Kowalski et al., 2008). What distinguishes cyber-bullying from traditional bullying is the notion of anonymity. An individual is more motivated to use this platform as he or she has the power to conceal their identity.

Physical proximity is not as significant with the rise in modern advancement (Gane & Beer, 2008). A veil of anonymity makes cyber-bullying attractive for those who inflict harm via their online networks. Anonymity also complicates any attempts made to identify the true perpetrator (Notar et al., 2013). Technology encourages pro-bullying behaviours online as one may perceive fewer costs when engaging online as opposed to offline (Kirwan & Power, 2013). Thus, technology may encourage behaviours outside of a normative framework. Notar et al. (2013) suggest that relative anonymity allows perpetrators to peruse online networks outside of a normative framework of social control, morality and ethics. Despite this, research has found that most victims know, or at least believe to know, who is bullying them (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). The bully is often within one's social network.

Another important element that differentiates cyber-bullying from traditional forms of bullying is the global reach of the audience. Cyber-bullying becomes an online spectacle for the interaction to be consumed and 'shared' by audiences worldwide (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Kirwan & Power, 2013). A final aspect concerns the bully's ability to disrupt the victim's social

and online networks. Kirwan and Power (2013) establish the concept of ‘hyperpersonal communication’ in computer-mediated communication where users feel more emotionally connected online rather than offline. Although the scope of cyber-bullying is well researched, less is known about incidence and prevalence rates<sup>2</sup>.

The literature reveals the difficulty of extrapolating a consistent definition of cyber-bullying behaviour. As a result, it becomes evident that a true definition of cyber-bullying varies among academics and individuals alike. For example, the discipline of education may have researchers who focus on cyber-bullying within an educational context and provide school-based measures. Such an approach overshadows other prominent factors, such as a digital landscape that allows for the making of multiple identities. Attempts made at analyzing the medium (e.g. social media platforms, technological devices, and electronic communication) in conjunction with cyber-bullying is challenged by the recycling of modern society. A recycling that occurs when a particular technology outgrows the consumer’s thirst for new.

Cyber-bullying has the potential to take on a new meaning for individuals. Not only evidenced in research, but must also be considered in practice. An all-encompassing definition can add value to this area of research<sup>3</sup>. First, a consistent conceptual framework will provide a clearer picture of incidence and prevalence rates. Second, a consistent conceptual framework

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<sup>2</sup> The bulk of cyber-bullying literature struggles to present accurate incidence rates. Capturing the frequency of cyber-bullying has led to varying ways of counting ‘cyber-bullying’ incidents thereby resulting in inconsistent prevalence rates. This chapter revisits the problematic nature of determining incidence and prevalence rates.

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, the researcher has not established a definition of cyber-bullying due to the definitional issues stipulated above. This thesis concerns the public opinion research and will not attempt to advance a different definition of cyber-bullying; however, recognizes that cyber-bullying can cause great harm as well as occurs over via the use of technological devices and/or social media platforms.

aligned with accurate prevalence rates will aid in implementing more appropriate cyber-bullying measures. These issues will be further highlighted throughout this chapter.

**Prevalence rates.** Attempts have been made to determine how frequently cyber-bullying occurs with examples including: Canada (Li, 2006; Pepler et al., 2006); the United States (Addington, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Oppliger, 2013); Europe (Menesini et al., 2012; Ortega et al., 2012); China (Zhou et al., 2013); Africa (Ephraim, 2013); and, Australia (Goff, 2011), to name a few. Victimization rates range from approximately 20 to 40% of all youth having experienced cyber-bullying at some point (Tokunaga, 2010), while perpetrator rates seem to hover around the range of 5% to 35% (Li, 2006; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Dehue et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Kowalski et al., 2013; Cappadocia, Craig & Pepler, 2013; Dehue, 2013).

Few studies have attempted to examine cyber-bullying internationally. A noteworthy exception is a study conducted by Ipsos in 2012. Conducted on behalf of Reuters News, Ipsos surveyed a total of 18,687 citizens in 24 countries via online surveying. Ipsos (2012) found that one out of every ten parents online reported their child being exposed to a form of cyber-bullying (12%) while approximately one in four reported (26%) that they knew a child in their community who had experienced cyber-bullying. The majority (60%) reported that the victims experienced cyber-bullying on social networking websites, such as Facebook (Ipsos, 2012). Worldwide, the Ipsos (2012) survey found that citizens are concerned about cyber-bullying and believe special attention to the issue is required. However, there may be a self-selection problem with this sample as the sample consisted of parents aware of their child's cyber-bullying experience. They may be sensitized to the subject matter.

In Canada, the Canadian Council of Learning (2008) reports that Canada has the 9<sup>th</sup> highest rate of bullying among those in the 13-year-old category. The same survey found that

when parents were polled, 47% of Canadian parents report having a child victim of bullying while 16% indicated that bullying was a frequent experience for their child (Canadian Council of Learning, 2008). For the general Canadian population, the 2009 General Social Survey reports that users of social networking sites are twice as likely identify as a victim of cyber-bullying (GSS, 2009). The GSS (2009) also indicates that young adults aged 18 to 34 (17%), singles (15%), homosexuals (18%), and persons with a disability (22%) have an increased risk of cyber-bullying. These findings suggest that almost one in ten adults live in a household with a child who has been the victim of a cyber-bully (9%), which appears to be more of an issue for girls more than boys (71%). Participants knew the identity of the cyber-bully, such as a classmate (40%), friend (20%), or acquaintance (11%); however, only 14% of those incidents were reported to the police.

In the United States, the Pew Research Center published a survey from the syndicated Pew Internet & American Life Project about bullying, cyber-bullying, and the Internet activity of teenagers. They (2013) found that teens share more information about themselves online than offline. For example, approximately 91% post a photo of themselves; 71% reveal their school name and city of residence; 53% post their email address; and, 20% post their cell phone number. The Pew Research Center (2013) study reported that one in six teens have been contacted by a stranger in a way that made them feel anxious and uncomfortable. Furthermore, gender is a strong indicator of being contacted by a stranger whereby 24% of girls compared to 10% of boys reported this contact (Pew Research Center, 2013). Within the same study, 72% of parents reported feeling a sense of concern about their child's Internet activity with at least 53% of these parents feeling "very" concerned.

Research in the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe also report diverse findings. Approximately 21% of UK children and 19% of children across Europe report having been bullied with 8% reporting the incident *had occurred online* (EU Kids Online, 2012). Additionally, 11% of children from this EU Kids Online (2012) report bullying others with 2-3% revealing that they bullied another child in the past 12 months. Of this same sample, 19% have been bullied either online or offline with 6% *of those being bullied online*. The EU Kids Online sample is comprehensive as the sample polls 25,142 children aged 9 to 16 from 33 countries, including Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Russia, Switzerland, and the UK. A noteworthy finding is the fact that traditional bullying is reported more frequently than cyber-bullying.

Ipsos (2012) found that parents who reported cyber-bullying of their children were primarily from Brazil (19%), Saudi Arabia (19%), Canada (18%), and the United States (15%). In contrast, those least likely to report a child who had been cyber-bullied were more likely to reside in Turkey (6%), Spain (6%), Russia (5%), France (5%), and Italy (3%). Although cyber-bullying rates appear to differ from country to country, Walther (2012) argues that even the lowest numbers are concerning. Prevalence rates should be interpreted at face value considering the values are projections only.

As a projection only, prevalence rates should be reviewed with caution for a number of factors. First, as noted previously, there are definitional issues with the term “cyber-bullying.” Second, prevalence rates are determined unsystematically, as highlighted by Cesaroni et al. (2012). Particularly, Cesaroni et al. (2012) take issue with the way cyber-bullying incidents are counted. For example, are incidents counted on a case-by-case basis or counted based on the number of actions inflicted against another individual online? Additionally, the majority of

surveys tend to study younger demographics to determine exposure. These rates are less generalizable to the general public. More concerning is the fact that some studies have oversimplified as well as decontextualized the nature and prevalence of cyber-bullying. The following section will examine current methodologies employed in cyber-bullying research.

**Methodologies.** Whether cyber-bullying is framed as an extension of traditional bullying or a separate issue unique to cyber-bullying, the subject matter of “cyber-bullying” has been subject to interpretation. Kirwan and Power (2013) suggest that different researchers employ a diverse conceptual framework regarding cyber-bullying, such as by considering cyber-bullying as a form of violence, aggression, and/or harm. Ambiguity becomes an issue wherein certain concepts may be adopted while others are overlooked, in underestimating or overestimating the actual rate of cyber-bullying. Furthermore, ambiguity may lead to skewed prevalence rates making the determination of the seriousness of the problem even more difficult (Kirwan & Power, 2013). Not only are definitional issues present in cyber-bullying research, but also problematic selection practices, which encourages a self-selection of those most sensitized to the problem of cyber-bullying.

One point of contention revolves around the common issue of self-selection. These samples may consist of parents or guardians; teachers as well as school administrators; and/or the general public, whom have some experience with or interest in cyber-bullying. Self-selecting sample groups potentially runs the risk of compromising the integrity of the study by the way of inflating one’s findings. Cesaroni et al. (2012) discuss the repercussions of ‘self-selecting’ certain populations, which produces a bias concerning the issue being examined. When participants are self-selected as a way of sequestering certain demographics—such as gender, age, race, and convenience, to name a few—has the potential to produce a bias. A bias or slant

has the potential to result in oversensitivity to cyber-bullying (Cesaroni et al., 2012). With oversensitivity is the likelihood of an overblown societal reaction by the way of a moral panic. This issue will be explored later in this chapter.

Another problematic issue is the selection of an individual who speaks on behalf of another. For example, and in most cases, parents or guardians speaking on behalf of a youth or minor. A host of problems arise when attempting to research a vulnerable group, such as children and youth. When parents or guardians are surveyed about a child's victimization and/or bullying, consideration should be given regarding whether these rates are underestimating the actual rate of victimization. Turner et al. (2011) argue that relying on guardian or parent reporting may result in an underestimation of victimization rates, especially if the sample group is unaware of the incident. The victim may hesitate to report their victimization out of fear of retaliation from the perpetrator, fear of punishment or confiscation of their electronic devices, and fear of isolation or rejection from their peer networks and social circles (Dehue et al., 2008; Chang et al., 2013; Dehue, 2013). Conversely, parents, and/or guardians may also believe that an incident is more serious than it is – the child may react less intensely and think it is “not a big deal.”

Concerns have also been raised regarding the direction of research that focuses on both traditional bullying and cyber-bullying. When youth are sampled about their cyber-bullying activities or experiences, researchers will also include questions about bullying. Cesaroni et al. (2012) have found authors to ‘intricately connect’ traditional bullying and cyber-bullying measures in their studies. This occurs when measures are developed with the intent of exploring traditional bullying, but are also applied to cyber-bullying. Wolak, Mitchell and Finkelhor (2007) have expressed concern with qualifying online harassment as traditional bullying. Whereas traditional bullying typically occurs in school (Wolak et al., 2007), Dehue (2013) argues that



cyber-bullying is more likely to occur at home. Cyber-bullying is more likely to occur without feelings of social constraint and “regardless of his or her social standing or popularity at school” (Cappadocia et al., 2013, p. 172). Applying measures constructed for traditional bullying to cyber-bullying results in a failure to capture the many nuances of cyber-bullying.

Finally, definitional and methodological issues ignore what has been theoretically suggested, such as the need to develop more critical and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of social problems. The current state of research neglects the intertwined political, social, spatial, and legislative conditions as of modern societies. Failing to account for these conditions produce an inadequate understanding of frequency and severity of cyber-bullying. Moreover, studies produced in this vein often ignore whether youth perceive the incident as serious or harmful (Wolak et al., 2007). If the youth felt distressed, research also fails to take into account the long-term harm generated from the cyber-bullying incident (Cesaroni et al., 2012). If studies probe direct experience, and the level of harm that precipitates, then studies should also seek to explore subsequent behavioural adjustments, especially long-term implications. Studies may account for victimization, but failure to ascertain any long-term effects could exaggerate the long-term effects of cyber-bullying.

### **Framing and Blaming: Moral Panics and Youth Culture**

Most notably absent from the current state of research is direct consultation with the public. Although the scholarship may incorporate anecdotal evidence from adults or guardians, including the medical, educational, and health institutions, the research is typically reduced to a dichotomy between the victim and perpetrator. One example is from Sawyer et al. (2011) who interviewed 20 parents to observe their reactions to bullying, including how to conceptualize and intervene in these incidents. This qualitative research endeavor enhances intervention efforts by

tapping into public opinion at the local level and highlights the need for an open dialogue. Creating an open dialogue is the first step to better understanding the level of harm that cyber-bullying precipitates, including subsequent behavioural adjustments and long-term implications.

Studies conducted in the area of cyber-bullying and the prevalence rates of cyber-bullying seem to suggest that cyber-bullying is largely an issue that happens to youth. Not only are youth deemed problematic and a risk to society, their online presence is framed around notions of regulation. Thus, cyber-bullying is often associated with the risky online activities of youth. Through this representation, youth are framed as the ‘usual suspects’ where being a teenager is linked to moral panics about crime and incivility (Yar, 2005). The following section will deconstruct the role of moral panics and how a moral panic is produced. Finally, this section will explore how youth are framed and subsequently blamed in this labeling process as both the perpetrator and victim.

Cohen (1972) first conceptualized the term moral panic to describe the reaction that members of society project to certain subgroups of society. The essence of a moral panic is:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media, the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people. (p. 9)

Framed as a threat, these ‘right-thinking people’ are tasked with relaying to the public the seriousness of the threat and the measures to be appropriated. Although each threat is composed of unique characteristics, Cohen (2002) revises the concept to establish how each threat is framed as something:

*New* (lying dormant perhaps, but hard to recognize; deceptively ordinary and routine, but invisibly creeping up the moral horizon) – but also *old* (camouflaged versions of traditional and well-known evils). They are damaging in *themselves* – but also merely *warning signs* of the real much deeper and more prevalent condition. They are *transparent* (anyone can see what’s happening) – but also *opaque*: accredited experts

must explain the perils hidden behind the superficially harmless (decode a rock song's lyrics to see how they led to a school massacre). (p. vii/viii)

When panic results in an amplification of public fear and concern, institutions of social control are pressured to mitigate the deviancy amplification (Young, 2009). In this process, Cohen uses the word "panic" to illustrate the ways in which a perceived threat may be the result of faulty or illogical thinking. The literature on moral panics seem to indicate that the term "panic" can reproduce unnecessary trouble and harm (Cohen, 1999; Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Young, 2009). In a moral panic, the reactions from various sources—from the media to politicians—ignore the deeper structural and systemic issues at play to disproportionately focus on the exaggerated concern (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

What has garnered a considerable amount of attention from the academic community is the construction and manufacturing of a moral panic. Becker (1967) establishes the 'hierarchy of credibility' as one way to deconstruct the legitimacy of an existing rank system whereby certain individuals are granted the authority to offer judgment, to define the nature of reality, and to orchestrate the master narrative. The public learns to accept the master narrative *vis-à-vis* the adoption of a "commonsense view which awards unquestioned credibility to the responsible official" (Becker, 1967, p. 244). Moral panics are monopolized by certain individuals who have vested interests in making their truth claims appear valid, which explains the use of "expert" testimony, such as doctors, researchers, academics, and police, to name a few (Schissel, 2006). Anyone short of an "expert" is ultimately ignored in this process. Thus, moral panics can be differentiated from fads because although short-lived, the former tends to leave a lasting institutional impression (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

Those "in the know" are regarded as experts in the claims-making industry by linking new and unpredictable threats to "its deep roots in a transparent past" (Cohen, 1999, p. 586).

Tanner (2010) regards this claims-making process as one that occurs when social problems are identified by key individuals and groups. Once identified, the media presents an amplified that both seeks to explain and provide an outcome that intentionally bolsters the dominant ideology (Young, 2009). For Young (2009), social anxieties are displaced upon a scapegoat or 'trigger groups' who are not chosen by accident. Sometimes this will occur by targeting certain subcultures or individuals whose appearances fit the stereotypes of those subcultures, such as youth who appear to fit the stereotype of urban culture. The exaggerated response constructs "folk devils" or "deviant stereotypes identifying the enemy, the source of the threat, selfish, evil, wrongdoers who are responsible for the trouble" (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 156).

The media engages in a form of framing where certain images and messages are selected with the intent of highlighting certain events or issues in a way that promotes a particular interpretation, emotion, and, as a result, solution (Jiwani & Young, 2006). For Entman (1993), this is considered the appropriation of culturally specific sentiments employed to have the greatest potential for influence by resonating and becoming salient in society. When the problem is defined and the solution is applied according to the ideological lens employed, these conceptions become engrained in the public's collective consciousness. This symbiotic relationship allows social hierarchies to flourish in relation to the 'Other'. What remains clear is the fact that fear seems to fit as the symptom of a moral panic (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009).

The category of youth is a socially constructed category coalesced with adult fears and anxieties stemming from modern society (Brown, 2005). When a moral panic is manufactured, youth are framed as coordinated and calculated menaces to society; that is, a representation that supports the social fragmentation of society based upon one's race, class, and gender (Schissel, 2006; Tanner, 2010). Tanner (2010) employs the 'youth-in-crisis' perspective in which youth are

seen as threatening to the social order. However, public opinion on crime is largely established by relying on hierarchies of credibility to dictate and frame the problem as well as solution. The response is a condemnation of youth culture including: the three-strikes movement, boot camps, and curfews. However, these measures encourage authoritarianism, censorship, and regulation (Brown, 2005). On one hand, scapegoating youth is a successful political ideology, but presents the risk of further alienating younger generations (Schissel, 2006).

Historical panics concerning subgroups of youth has shifted to a totalizing discourse of panic surrounding young people as well as youth culture (Brown, 2005). An example includes the media's fascination with exaggerating the narrative of girls' aggression by insisting, "Girls are becoming more like boys" (Brown, Chesney-Lind & Stein, 2013, p. 21). Although this phenomenon seems relatively new, a "bad girl" label equates female deviant behaviour as a product of the feminist movement (Brown et al., 2013). These claims-making positivistic contentions seem to imply that women's liberation will erode the traditional lines of gender roles where women will adopt masculine traits. However, this gendered portrayal contains elements of patriarchal discourse. The "bad girl" label obscures the fact that traditional criminological conceptions of crime neglected female offending and deviance (Brown et al., 2013; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013). For Schissel (2006), the public's perception of crime is largely informed by a number of misjudgments and fear about race, geography, and family constitution.

Misinformation is indicative of a more serious problem where the Internet and technology assumes a negative connotation. Wall (2011) dismantles historical and sociological conceptions of the Internet by framing the Internet as dystopic. The Internet is dystopic as it is augmented between rhetoric and reality (Wall, 2011). Examples of the current narrative include the sensationalist way government campaigns construct cyber crimes, how the media reports and

constructs cyber crimes, and the drafting of legislation in response to cyber crimes. These examples can influence public perceptions of technology, including the cultivation of technology, and the acceptance of technological innovation. The current narrative serves to shape public reactions to technological change in a more negative and cautious way (Wall, 2011). Framing the Internet as a dystopic place allows state power to influence, impede, and/or redefine technological innovation (Wall, 2008). Unfortunately, this reaction overshadows the positives of technological innovation and advancement. As a result, a conscious effort has been put forth to ensure that this thesis does not replicate or partake in historical representations of the Internet as an inherently unsafe environment.

The discourse of the media encapsulates language that is morality-laden and ideological in nature whereby only certain individuals have the power to craft the language; primarily, those belonging to privilege, power, and status (Schissel, 2006). This language shifts attention away from the implications of capitalist power where the crime control model is profitable. Where the commodification of crime and deviance in the United States reinforces the prison industrial complex. Thus, class stratification is legitimized *vis-à-vis* the preservation of class differences (Schissel, 2006). Since the problem is distorted, media consumers learn about the problem in a decontextualized manner. Through misrepresentation, the narrative blurs the line between crime prevention and the politics of blame. Legislation may provide a “band aid” solution to the digital environment while yielding ambiguous legal parameters and consequences.

### **Legislation on Cyber-bullying**

Legislation has been enacted over the years to address the definition and legal parameters surrounding cyber-crimes. Each country will respond to cyber-bullying in a different manner based upon the legal definition of the crime, including the parameters established to investigate,

sanction, and retain evidence pertaining to the incident itself. This section will outline legislation from around the world. Legal scholarship has noted that the current international legislative bodies differ in terms of definitional constraints, the elected bodies to intervene in cyber-bullying incidents, and the diverse cyber-bullying initiatives employed on an international scale.

In Canada, the legal definition of cyber-bullying varies by province and territory. Although no specific definition or section explicitly deals with cyber-bullying, there is a series of *Criminal Code* sections being applied to cyber-bullying cases, including: criminal harassment; uttering threats; intimidation; mischief in relation to data; unauthorized use of computer; identity fraud; extortion; false messages, indecent or harassing telephone calls; counseling suicide; defamation; incitement of hatred; and, child pornography offences. Meanwhile, the Senate has attempted to introduce a series of *Criminal Code* amendments in conjunction with a series of bills. Cyber-bullying bills have garnered some controversy. From 2011 to 2013, Bill C-273 sought to amend the *Criminal Code* to conceptualize cyber-bullying as an offence and also sought to clarify existing laws in Canada. The bill was criticized for only conceptualizing the problem thereby neglecting how to contextualize the issue. Bill C-279 is another private member's bill, which received a second reading in the Senate on June 5, 2014, to amend the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the *Criminal Code* (gender identity). By establishing discrimination on the ground of gender identity, this bill attempts to establish that discrimination based on one's gender should be considered an aggravating factor at the time of sentencing.

In a more controversial step, the *Protecting Canadians From Online Crime Act*, also referred to as Bill C-13, seeks to bolster a police state. This bill addresses the necessary power to obtain and preserve content that was taken without consent. However, the bill also addresses the issuance of a warrant and the discretionary powers of the criminal justice apparatus. C-13 also

broadens the investigative power by tracking the data of telecommunications; the monitoring of transactions and individuals; and, the ability to intercept private communications. Another bill entangled in this political agenda is coined the *Anti-terrorism Act* or Bill C-51, which seeks to enhance the power of government institutions and departments to disclose thereby sharing information to other Government of Canada institutions. C-51 also encourages the identification and swift response to individuals posing a threat to public safety.

What becomes problematic is the ambiguous nature of such bills. A host of questions arise ranging from the type of information being disclosed as well as the individuals who are privy to this information. While these bills strengthen the state apparatus, cyber-bullying is addressed in a haphazard and disingenuous manner. Where cyber-bullying appears to be the concern, the end result advances an ideological agenda under the guise of enhancing nationalism and safeguarding security. While Bill C-13 received Royal Assent and is now law, Bill C-51 is at the third reading in Senate and appears to be inching closer to Royal Assent, the final process before being assumed as law.

The provinces of Canada have taken another approach to cyber-bullying. A series of provisions include: (1) Alberta's *Education Act* (2015) calls for a refrain from bullying and cyber-bullying behaviours in school, whether or not it occurs within the school building, during the school day or by electronic means; (2) Ontario's *Accepting Schools Act* (2012) requires schools to establish bullying prevention and intervention plans; offer resources and support; and, (3) Quebec's Bill 56, *An Act to Prevent and Stop Bullying and Violence in School* (2012), requires schools to implement anti-bullying plans (MediaSmarts, n.d.). Evidently, the law is not evenly applied and, in absence of any *Criminal Code* section explicitly applying to cyber-bullying cases, the education system has onus for ensuring a safe learning environment.



Criminal justice personnel have also introduced a series of initiatives targeting cyber-bullying. First, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection operates *Cybertip.ca* and *NeedHelpNow.ca* for Canadians to report instances of sexual exploitation and to find social supports. Second, the RCMP Centre for Youth Prevention offers resources ranging from fact sheets to interactive learning tools for youth, guardians, and individuals in positions of authority who come into direct contact with youth. The Centre for Youth Prevention attempts to teach the general public about bullying and cyber-bullying. Third, the Public Safety Canada's *Get Cyber Safe* initiative also seeks to provide fact sheets and learning modules teaching safe cyber practices. The mandate of these initiatives is to raise awareness as well as encourage victims to come forward to the authorities.

The United States has chosen another approach in response to cyber-bullying. In the United States (U.S.), bullying and cyber-bullying legislation is enacted by each state. Forms of bullying are considered a form of discriminatory harassment covered under federal civil rights laws (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). When bullying occurs because of one's race, national origin, or sex, the education system is legally mandated to resolve the incident, such as by investigating the incident, to respond swiftly, and prevent the harassment from recurring (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014).

According to research conducted by Hinduja and Patchin (2014), the current legal discourse includes: bullying laws (enacted in 49 states); laws referring to "cyberbullying" (enacted in 20 states); laws referring to "electronic harassment" (enacted in 48 states); includes a criminal sanction (enacted in 14 states); includes a school sanction (enacted in 44 states); requires school policy (enacted in 49 states); and, includes off campus behaviours (enacted in 13 states). Each state is tasked with employing laws pertaining to cyber-bullying and electronic

harassment, which results in great variation among states. For example, some states will include the bullying provisions and policies listed above (e.g. Tennessee) while others may include only criminal sanctioning (e.g. Montana). Furthermore, Hinduja and Patchin's (2014) research reveals that although schools are responsible for enforcing legislation, only 20 states have laws referring to "cyberbullying." This occurs as more states have laws referring to "electronic harassment" compared to "cyberbullying." What becomes concerning is the vast variation among states. For victims who have been cyber-bullied in the United States, and depending on the state he or she is living in, their state may or may not legally recognize their victimization.

Unlike Canada, the education system is legally responsible for instilling a safe learning environment, abolishing harmful behaviour, and taking the appropriate steps in a swift as well as just manner. In fact, schools are ordered to follow certain policies and guidelines for the uses of technology in and out of the classroom (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). Escalating harassment requires a formal grievance to be lodged with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). The majority of states have enacted legislation in response to bullying and harassment *vis-à-vis* electronic communications. In the United States, these departments indoctrinate harassment in the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*; the *Education Amendments of 1972*; the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*; the *Americans with Disabilities Act*; and, *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services has established an online initiative called *Stop Bulling*, which differentiates between bullying and cyber-bullying; identifies those at risk; and, offers resolutions.

Similar to the United States, the United Kingdom (U.K.) does not have a legal definition of cyber-bullying entrenched in legislation. Existing U.K. laws have established parameters for

responding to bullying and cyber-bullying, including *Protection from Harassment Act 1997*; *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994*; *Malicious Communications Act 1988*; *Communications Act 2003*; *Breach of the Peace* (Scotland); and, the *Defamation Act 2013*. Along with existing legislation, the Crown Prosecution Service has established guidelines for responding to cyber-bullying cases in 2012. These guidelines include what constitutes credible threats of violence; communications targeting certain individuals; and, communications considered offensive, indecent, obscene or false (Crown Prosecution Service, 2012). The U.K. has also crafted a series of resourceful initiatives both online and offline, such as the *Smile Foundation* seeks to provide coping strategies to individuals who have been negatively impacted by their online experiences.

The European Union (E.U.) and European Union states do not have specific laws defining and addressing cyber-bullying, but have existing harassment, stalking, and defamation laws. The most notable piece of legislation is the *Data Protection Directive*, which applies to all the states in the European Union. First, the directive provides the legal framework for protecting citizens who consume electronic technology. Second, the directive also includes the methods employed to intervene when one's personal data has been breached alongside the collection and preservation of data. When a cyber-bully discloses personal information without consent, the cyber-bully who is now regarded as the "data controller," subsumes legal responsibilities as a result of being in possession of another individual's personal data (COFACE, 2013). In Europe, *Delete Cyber-bullying* is an initiative endeavoring to provide awareness and education to the general public as a means of encouraging healthy cyber practices.

The legislative climate presents a few issues and concerns. The current legal response to the Internet is indicative of an increasingly regulated environment for users around the world. In

Canada, for instance, Internet access policy functions as an extension of national policy (Slane, 2007). Under the guise of national security, including the prevention of cyber-terrorism and cyber-espionage, Canada's Bill C-51 legitimizes the collection of personal data online.

Investigative powers are restructured in order to obtain, collect, and preserve personal data. The concept of personal data in cyberspace establishes a dichotomy between personal property rights and autonomy rights (Slane, 2005). More consideration should be paid to the mutually constructive relationship users share with technology. Technology can shape the user while the user has the potential and power to shape technology. However, online borders are slowly resembling physical borders laced "with political and cultural significance" (Slane, 2008, p. 151).

Due to the political and cultural influences of the Internet, Canadian privacy rights are often rooted in an ideological relationship between privacy, bodily integrity, and human dignity (Slane, 2010). Not only is the user's technological imprint subjected to scrutiny and investigation, but the body is also subjected to investigation both online and offline. Slane (2010) discusses the prominence of body scanners and physically invasive technologies, including cell phone cameras, which challenges the notion of human dignity as well as whether harm to privacy should be considered a form of tampering with human dignity. These questions further obscure how best to legislate and enforce the law in increasingly networked societies. As technology advances forward and blurs the time-space continuum, citizens and state actors are provided with the resources to regulate and monitor the human body. In fact, technology in and of itself provides a wealth of information regarding nation-states, global villages, and citizens. The relatively easy to access private information regardless of physical borders reinforces the problematic nature of technology; specifically, the lack of boundaries necessary for safeguarding

personal data as well as one's sense of agency or sense of self while partaking in information and communication technology.

The proliferation of counter-terrorism policy can be regarded as a topic of national and international discussion since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, that brought down the Twin Towers in New York and resulted in the deaths of thousands of people. The national security agenda has transpired from an emergency preparedness strategy to both a legal discourse and ideological framework. For many Canadians, how national security is enforced, and tactics used to bolster national security, remains a relatively secretive mission enforced by the government. With proportionality in mind, Roach (2006) describes the need for a balancing act to assure a balance between security and rights. Such a theoretical approach should also account for the limitations of increasing risk-based societies. Primarily, risk management as an approach can only account for a number of threats and uncertainties. Roach (2006) describes counter-terrorism strategies, especially in Canada, where "national security confidentiality and the evidence cannot be disclosed to the affected person" (p. 18). The legal discourse that has transpired over the year has called for a discussion between the balance between privacy and security, including the role of the user and the technology.

Ultimately, the question remains whether Internet users, or individuals who use electronic and communication platforms, are capable of self-regulation (Bishop, 2011). If not, the question is often who has the power to impose such restrictions? This appears to be an international issue, but also potentially controversial in the United States where the U.S. Congress and state legislatures have encountered great difficulty amending existing stalking and harassment laws, especially for statutes laced with heavy 'prosecution-oriented language', as these provisions are often viewed as tampering with First and Fourteenth Amendment freedoms (Fukuchi, 2011, p. 290). The

concern is largely tied to the notion of democracy as well as how democracy is predicated on the fundamentals of citizen engagement and participation.

This chapter has examined the trajectory of cyber-bullying research. Given that concepts and methodologies employed in any research will affect the conclusions it produces. It is problematic when research is decontextualized and disaggregated. Consequentially, the purpose of this research project is to mediate these common practices. Public opinion is sought to challenge the current legislative discourse that seeks to teach users self-regulation. Self-regulation is another way to responsabilize the public.

Media literacy and safe Internet practices can instill a degree of caution for using technology; however, may also produce a sense of fear and anxiety of technology in general. Responsibilization also sheds attention away from key stakeholders, including the criminal justice apparatus, which enacts and enforces the law. For that, the research question of this thesis intends to investigate the seriousness of key stakeholders against cyber-bullying by asserting:

*RQ1: Does the public perceive cyber-bullying as a problem?*

*RQ2: Are stakeholders taking sufficient action against cyber-bullying?*

*RQ3: Should special laws be introduced to deal specifically with cyber-bullying?*

The purpose of pursuing this avenue of research is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how research influences not only policy decisions, but also legislation and criminalization. However, little is known about how the public perceives the effectiveness of measures introduced to combat cyber-bullying, including how well the “experts” or stakeholders are doing when it pertains to the issue of cyber-bullying.

Public consultation provides an opportunity for public engagement, especially the feeling that one’s opinion holds weight in the response against cyber-bullying. Sound research also provides an outlet to showcase opinions on legislative practice and the public’s perception of

legislative enforcement. For the current study, I will attempt to mediate these critical gaps in research; in particular, how the public perceives the current legislative practice in Canada and what level of enforcement should be established. The sole purpose of this research endeavor is to provide an alternative that takes into account the importance of research that allows for public participation and enhances research in the discipline of criminological studies.

### Chapter Three: Method

As noted in the Introduction, this thesis explores how the public perceives cyber-bullying legislation. The trend in sampling this area of research is to survey youth, parents, and/or those working in the field of education; however, this practice often ignores the importance of public opinion, such as how one's understanding of cyber-bullying may vary based upon locality. As a result, this research project is tasked with uncovering public opinion in a city conveniently located near the University of Ontario Institute of Technology.

The study consisted of twenty individuals from Oshawa; a city located in Ontario, Canada. This community is nestled east of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). A random sample was selected using the *411.ca* to retrieve a list of landline phone numbers in the Oshawa region. Every fifth number from each letter of the alphabet was counted and subsequently recorded before the dialing process began. For example, every fifth, tenth, fifteenth, twentieth, twenty-fifth and thirtieth letter was recorded for each letter of the alphabet. The letters XYZ were treated as one letter for a total of twenty-four letters instead of twenty-six. Each round consisted of counting and recording ten telephone numbers from each letter of the alphabet. I then recorded what name and number was left off in case another round was required; enabling a seamless transition from one round to the next.

The survey contains two distinct components with the first component discussing five fictional scenarios while the second component examines opinions regarding legislation. The five scenarios were derived from cases that have appeared in the media. These cases touch on individuals who have encountered one of the following five issues: (1) homophobia; (2) rape; (3) disability; (4) one's physical appearance; (5) and, racism, all in conjunction with the use of technology. Each scenario ends with the individual being teased or harassed to the extent that he



or she commits suicide. Follow-up questions are asked with the intention of determining “what do you feel is the most troubling aspect of this story?” and “what do you feel may have led to the young person’s suicide?” after describing each scenario to the participant. Additional questions were asked to assess “how troubling is it that it involved social media or technology?” and “how troubling is it that it involved and incident based on” each one of the issues stated above. The first component is not included in thesis since it did not ask about cyber-bullying.

This thesis is structured around the second component, legislation, and the level of knowledge that members of the general public have with regards to laws on cyber-bullying. The first question addressed in this research project examines public perceptions on the current legislative response to the cyber-bully, not only within one’s local community, but also the response across Canada. Unpacking respondent answers to this question allows for a discussion on whether the current definition of cyber-bullying confuses the public’s ability to identify forms of bullying and cyber-bullying when the behaviour occurs. As attempts were made to unpack public perceptions on cyber-bullying, the survey did not define cyber-bullying on purpose as the intent was to understand how the public perceived the issue. This was particularly important as the first component included scenarios on bullying and bullying with the use of technology, and sought public opinion on whether these scenarios should be considered traditional bullying, cyber-bullying, or elements of both.

The second component also seeks to determine whether cyber-bullying should be regarded as a problem in one’s country and community; whether cyber-bullying is viewed as a serious problem; whether stakeholders take cyber-bullying seriously and, if not, should stakeholders take more action; and, finally, whether special laws should be introduced to

specifically target cyber-bullying cases in Canada<sup>4</sup>. In order to further understand the public's perception of the current legislative environment, the survey did not disclose any current legislation on cyber-bullying. Without an explanation as to what constitutes as "special," and discussion on cyber-bullying laws enacted in Canada, the participants were only asked whether "special laws" should be introduced.

The initial intent was to recruit 200 participants. Issues from the onset created great difficulty securing participations for the current study. Out of 452 landline phone numbers dialed, the response rate hovered at 22.6%. Noteworthy studies in the area of Random Digit Dialing (RDD) methods demonstrate that an important limitation centers on sampling landline phones. The most prominent issue centers on sampling landline phones. As the current study relied on individuals with a landline phone the most prominent issues encountered throughout this phase of the study included a significant number of phone lines not in service, hang-ups, refusal to participate, and non-contact. These issues seem to be compounded by the fact that more individuals are adopting a cell-only lifestyle. Guterbock et al. (2011) describes the traditional RDD method as under 'threat' as a result of escalating rates of refusal, non-contact, and the proliferation of cell-only households. After spending time attempting to recruit volunteers for this study only twenty participants agreed to participate. The researcher chose to make the most of this low turnout rate in lieu of time restraints.

Although this method is beneficial for researchers conducting research in a particular geographical location, an implication of this sampling method is the development of a coverage bias. What must be taken into account is the growth and magnitude of a cell-only population. Individuals more likely to adopt a cell-only lifestyle are possibly the young, unmarried and

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A for the full survey instrument

members of ethnic or racial minorities belonging to a certain residential mobility and family structure (Ansolabehere & Schaffner, 2010; Ehlen & Ehlen, 2007; Guterbock et al., 2011; Zuwallack, 2009). Evidently, modern society consists of a growing population of cell-only users who are increasingly reliant on their cell-phone devices (Zuwallack, 2009). Cell-only adopters are not only more reliant on their cell-phone devices, but also more likely to bring their devices virtually everywhere. Traditional RDD cannot account for this growing population of cell-only users.

Thus, a small sample size hampers the type of statistical information that can be extracted from the data. Regardless of a smaller sample size, this research project presents an opportunity to approach cyber-bullying research in a refreshing yet under-utilized manner, which is the inclusion of public opinion. Demystifying how the public perceives the issue of cyber-bullying remains an important component of this research. Consequentially, the central research questions seek to uncover:

*RQ1: Does the public perceive cyber-bullying as a problem?*

*RQ2: Are stakeholders taking sufficient action against cyber-bullying?*

*RQ3: Should special laws be introduced to deal specifically with cyber-bullying?*

This question seeks to uncover the public's knowledge of cyber-bullying, including the current response from key stakeholders. Not only is determining how the public feels about the current response central to this research question, but also whether the issue is taken seriously by stakeholders. Based on this understanding, steps can be taken to capture whether the public perceives cyber-bullying as an issue and, consequentially, whether special laws against cyber-bullying is required.

To answer this research question, the primary mode of analysis will be in the form of descriptive and frequency statistics. Descriptive statistics will assist with quantifying the scope

of this research project. Frequency distribution tables will be administered as a means of quantifying how the respondents felt about cyber-bullying initiatives and interventions within a legal context. Furthermore, a simple univariate analysis will be conducted to determine frequencies and to gauge how the public feels about cyber-bullying within their local community as well as across Canada. The following section will showcase how the sample perceives cyber-bullying as a social problem, including the effectiveness of cyber-bullying interventions.

## Chapter Four: Results

### Demographics

The current study comprises of a sample of twenty participants. Females represent the majority of this sample. The participants vary in age from 18 years old to 84 years old; however, the majority of this sample consists of older adults. Out of the twenty participants, only one participant chose not to divulge their age. This sample is highly educated with the majority acquiring either a college/vocational degree (30%) or a university degree (25%). Only 5% of the sample had no or some high school. The same information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Participant characteristics (n = 20)*

	Number	%
Sex		
Male	3	15
Female	17	85
Age		
19-29	1	5
30-39	2	10
40-49	3	15
50-59	4	20
60-69	4	20
70-79	3	15
80-89	2	10
Education		
No or some high school	1	5
High school diploma	4	20
College or vocational degree	6	30
Some university	1	5
University	5	25
Graduate degree	3	15

Overall, then, the sample is predominantly a well-educated, older group of females.

### Is Cyber-Bullying a Problem?

Two important distinctions arise in determining whether cyber-bullying is an issue in Canada and/or is an issue in one's community. Table 2 captures the perceived problem of cyber-bullying. When asked about whether cyber-bullying is an issue in one's community, the participants were noticeably divided. Seventy-percent of the sample either strongly or somewhat agreed that cyber-bullying was a problem in Canada, while 45% either strongly or somewhat agreed that it was a problem in their community.

Table 2  
*Problem of cyber-bullying: Community vs. country*

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Unsure
Cyber-bullying is a problem in my community	35%	10%	15%	10%	5%	25%
Cyber-bullying is a problem in my country	65%	5%	15%	5%	--	10%

It is noteworthy to report that 25% of participants were unsure of whether cyber-bullying was a problem in their community (compared to only 10% who were unsure when asked about cyber-bullying in Canada). These findings are consistent with the GSS (2009) wherein the majority of Canadians report general satisfaction with their personal safety from crime. Overall, findings from Table 2 suggest that the majority of participants perceive cyber-bullying as a problem in Canada. The participants report cyber-bullying a problem in their community, but some variation is evident. While, at the same time, participants were slightly unsure about the problem of cyber-bullying in their local community.

The participants are sure that cyber-bullying is an issue in Canada, but lack a sufficient understanding of cyber-bullying in one's local community. Jackson, Gray, and Farrall (2009)

discuss the interlinking of social cohesion, informal social control, and community disorganization to extrapolate how one’s perception of fear—or perception of safety—emerges from diffuse anxiety. Although an individual may not have direct exposure to crime in their neighbourhood, diffused feelings of fear becomes an activity or routine in which one’s own behaviour is then adjusted. Fear of crime becomes an activity out of anxiety to adjust to feelings of crime and risk, but also when it concerns social changes and economic uncertainty (Jackson et al., 2009). Crime is then perceived as an impending “global” problem, but less of a problem in one’s “own back yard.”

The GSS (2009) found victims of crime to be less satisfied with their personal safety from crime. To capture the problem of cyber-bullying, efforts were made to establish direct exposure to bullying, and whether direct exposure intensifies one’s perception of cyber-bullying both locally and nationally. In Table 3, the participants were probed to based on whether bullying should be considered a part of a normal childhood; whether they have been bullied by another individual; ever witnessed another individual get bullied; and, if the participants have any experience with anyone he or she may know being harmed in any of the ways described in the scenarios. The responses are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3  
*Exposure to bullying*

	No	Yes
Bullying as part of a normal childhood	60%	40%
Bullied by someone before	35%	65%
Witnessed someone bully someone else	25%	75%
Witnessed someone harmed in any of the ways described in the scenarios	65%	35%

When asked whether bullying is part of a normal childhood, the sample seemed conflicted. The vast majority of the participants (60%) rejected the notion of bullying as part of a

normal childhood while 40% of the participants view bullying as part of a normal childhood. Evidently, the majority believes bullying should not be considered a 'normal' phase of transition for children and youth though a small minority associates bullying as normalized behaviour for this age group. Table 3 provides an interesting caveat to the current body of bullying and cyber-bullying literature. Where the literature has predominantly focused on youth as both perpetrators and victims of cyber-bullying, the literature tends to ignore the insights of individuals representing varying segments of society.

The findings in Table 3 exemplify the ways in which personal experience may shape current or future perspectives. The majority of this sample identifies being bullied by someone before (65%) and witness to someone bullying someone else (75%). Conversely, the participants have not been harmed, or know of anyone harmed, in any of the ways described in the scenarios (65%). It is important to highlight that the participants have direct experience with bullying; however, the majority of the sample has not been cyber-bullied. This may lend credence to their ability to understand the severity and scope of the scenarios.

Asking the participants to divulge any personal experience with the scenarios presented in this study provided a gauge with regards to individual experiences with homophobia, rape, disability, and racism. Scenarios reflected the inclusion or exclusion of technology to assess one's perception of social issues, including whether heightened concerns should be justified when the use of technology is evident. Those who have been bullied may have experienced instances of homophobia, rape, disability, and/or racism. Conversely, those who are cyber-bullied may also fall victim to homophobia, rape, disability, and/or racism. These issues suggest much larger processes at work in which technology remains another platform for perpetuating homophobia, rape, disability, and/or racism.



To capture the larger processes at play, the participants were probed to identify the exact point in which bullying should be deemed a criminal act. While probing the participants to determine criminality, certain patterns began to emerge<sup>5</sup>. The first pattern that emerges is a zero-tolerance policy for individuals who partake in bullying another. In particular, a number of participants found bullying to be deemed criminal right from the start. Participant 104 perceives bullying to be criminal from the onset by stating:

*The first time someone tries to bully [sic] someone else, from the beginning.*

This approach encourages a swift and effective response to dissuade the bullying behaviour from continuing. However, this approach also presupposes that a number of factors will fall into place, but is also complicated by the fact that bullying can escalate over time, could be carried out by a group of individuals, and places pressure on the victim to report this behaviour in the first place. Determining which traits should be considered criminal is a seemingly daunting task. Not only is the act considered criminal from the onset for some participants, others incorporate time as a deciding factor. Participant 108 states:

*If it keeps on, it should be reported.*

However, another participant departs from a zero-tolerance perspective to a more individualistic and micro approach to the issue. While Participant 108 believes the victim is responsible for reporting, another perspective considers criminality based on an individualized perspective:

*The reaction from the person. (Participant 207)*

As well as:

*When it affects somebody's quality of life. (Participant 103)*

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that these responses serve as an illustration only and were not subjected to any rigorous qualitative analyses. Responses in this section showcase the different patterns and themes emerging. As a result, this section is not representative of the sample and only seeks to highlight notable responses to the exact point in which bullying should be considered criminal.

These two responses reflect a departure from a “black and white” perspective to an assessment of how the individual being bullied perceives the behaviour. However, this response is also reflective of the complex nature of bullying. Comparatively, other participants found bullying to be a criminal act when an individual’s personal or private life is infringed upon. Participant 201 proclaims:

*As soon as you start invading someone’s personal space, physical or cyberspace, that is when it should be criminal.*

Participant 201 describes not only the importance of safeguarding one’s personal space in reality, but also their personal life in cyberspace. The notion of personal space and having control over one’s own private life is echoed once more. Participant 202 incorporates the notion of privacy and provides concrete examples to further establish when an individual’s sense of private life and personal is being threatened.

*When people are harassing you repeatedly or when people are moving into your private space and private affairs. (Participant 202)*

Participant 202 focuses on the role of repetition, and the failure to cease such behaviour. When certain behaviours fail to cease, a swift response could potentially halt further repetition.

While some participants hold the first act of bullying as criminal, others focus on the implications of bullying as an aggravating factor. Several participants found bullying to be criminal when the victim gets hurt (Participants 101, 104, 105, 109, 201, 204, and 209); when a suicide attempt is made (Participant 206); or, when the act becomes fatal whereby the victim commits suicide (Participants 204, 206, 208, 209, and 210). This is an important theme in which the participants verbalize and recognize the severity of aggressive bullying. However, the participants struggle to articulate coping strategies employed by individuals

attempting to manage in times when being bullied. Bullying can undoubtedly produce significant harm, but is not always fatal.

For Participant 207, bullying should be considered a criminal act when:

*You are old enough to know right from wrong.*

The expectation here is that morality teaches us right from wrong. Humans are rational thinkers who should be able to determine right from wrong and should be able to adjust their behaviour accordingly. However, the notion of morality can be challenged when considering how society functions. One participant discerns society as regressing by stating,

*I don't think we as a society have established because it happens so young.*  
(Participant 107)

These patterns highlight the crux of issue, which is the fact that bullying is visibly nuanced when public opinion is sought.

One's exposure to bullying has the potential to influence how they perceive the issue of cyber-bullying. However, this remains a mere illustration of how some participants determined criminal versus non-criminal bullying behaviours and, as a result, is not representative of the whole sample. The task becomes a matter of probing how previous exposure to bullying influences one's understanding of whether cyber-bullying is a serious problem. Table 4 employs a crosstab to determine the relationships between views on whether cyber-bullying is a serious problem and exposure to bullying<sup>6</sup>. Those with direct and indirect bullying experiences may view cyber-bullying more seriously compared to those who have not encountered bullying. The responses are shown below.

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<sup>6</sup> Crosstabs are employed throughout this chapter to examine any trends of this sample. Due to the low sample size, a chi-square test was not performed. A small sample size also results in the inability to ascertain whether any observable differences are statistically significant.

Table 4  
*Views on cyber-bullying as a serious problem based on previous exposure to bullying*  
 Views on Cyber-bullying as a Serious Problem

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Disagree	Total
Exposure to bullying					
No	3 (23.1%)	1 (100%)	1 (33.3%)	--	5
Yes	10 (76.9%)	--	2 (66.7%)	1 (100%)	13
Total	13 (72.2%)	1 (0.6%)	3 (16.7%)	1 (0.6%)	18

The majority of participants in Table 4 who perceived cyber-bullying to be a serious problem in Canada were more likely to be exposed to bullying. Those who were not exposed to bullying (5 participants) were also more likely to view cyber-bullying as a serious problem. An interesting finding arises in which those who were not exposed to bullying found cyber-bullying to be a serious problem in Canada. Conversely, a participant who was bullied did not perceive cyber-bullying as a serious problem in Canada.

The responses provided highlight the complexity of cyber-bullying research. Plausible explanations for this complexity include: (1) the proliferation of the Internet and technological devices; (2) the media's relentless sensationalizing of high profile cyber-bullying cases; and, (3) the current political discourse laced with anti-terrorism rhetoric exhibited most prominently in recent bills, such as Bill C-51. A fear of crime is more likely to occur when cyber-bullying is framed as an emerging threat. Fear mongering exists as an integral part of the neoliberal agenda to shift blame from one group to the next. Where youth and youth culture are webbed in notions of harm, deviance, and victimhood, the 'solution' often seeks to regulate and produce a response attached to an economic incentive.

As the participants view cyber-bullying as a problem, steps were taken to determine whether or not stakeholders take cyber-bullying seriously. The next section will probe how the

participants feel about the current response from stakeholders. Understanding the level of seriousness paid to cyber-bullying can uncover how stakeholders are viewed based on notions of legitimacy, authority, and trust. Based on these responses, an analysis will also address how one's exposure to bullying influences this opinion.

### **Are Stakeholders Taking Sufficient Action?**

The majority of the participants have experienced or witnessed an individual being bullied. With this in mind, participants were probed to determine how they felt about the current response to cyber-bullying, including whether more action is necessary. Table 5 illustrates how the participants feel about whether stakeholders are taking the issue of cyber-bullying seriously. These stakeholders include politicians, mental health professionals, school principals, and teachers. Table 5 provides insight into the level of seriousness taken by key stakeholders, as perceived by the participants.

Table 5  
*Cyber-bullying taken seriously by stakeholders*

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
Taken seriously by politicians	--	20%	10%	15%	10%	40%	5%
Taken seriously by mental health professionals	25%	30%	25%	--	15%	5%	--
Taken seriously by school principals and teachers	10%	35%	20%	20%	10%	5%	--
Taken seriously by people in my community	10%	25%	20%	5%	10%	5%	25%

While determining the level of seriousness, a trend arises in which some key stakeholders are perceived to take cyber-bullying cases more seriously in comparison to other stakeholders. The participants were divided when asked about whether cyber-bullying is taken seriously by politicians, mental health professionals, and school principals and teachers. In stark contrast, the participants felt that politicians have failed to take the issue of cyber-bullying seriously. The majority of the sample strongly disagrees (40%) that politicians take cyber-bullying seriously. Overall, over 65% of the sample disagrees on some level that politicians take cyber-bullying seriously. Mental health professionals as well as school principals and teachers received a more favourable response compared to politicians.

The participants were more favourable of mental health professionals and how seriously they take cyber-bullying. In fact, 80% of the sample agreed perceived mental health professionals to be taking the issue of cyber-bullying seriously. Although the next category received a diverse range of responses overall, the majority of the sample (65%) agreed on some level that principals and teachers take the issue of cyber-bullying seriously. Only 35% of the sample would disagree on some level with this statement.

An interesting finding from Table 5 is the scattering of responses for whether school principals and teachers have a genuine interest in combating cyber-bullying. If a minor or youth is subjected to cyber-bullying at home, there is a potential that he or she is also experiencing cyber-bullying at school. The response that school administrators and teachers received is indicative of a more serious problem. The question becomes whether the education system is taking enough action to prevent cyber-bullying. The answer to this question is important as the school environment may be more susceptible to cyber-bullying. Williams and Guerra (2007) have found that schools with a negative learning environment have not only a greater likelihood

of bullying, but also an increase in cyber-bullying incidents. Not only is the concern whether these stakeholders are taking sufficient action, but also whether certain environments (e.g. school system) are more susceptible to cyber-bullying.

Thus, the participants struggled with whether politicians, mental health professionals, and school principals and teachers have a genuine investment in combating cyber-bullying. Some of these stakeholders have failed to earn the trust of this sample to combat cyber-bullying. The sample shared an overwhelming sense of trust in mental health professionals, but wavered slightly in support for school administrators and teachers. Politicians feared the worst out of all the categories. A possible explanation could be collective distrust of political leaders or political cynicism. Additionally, whereas politics and political leaders are often infused into many news stories and more presumably in the public eye, that is rarely the case for mental health professionals. In sum, this sample is critical of politicians, including whether they have a genuine concern for those who are perpetuating cyber-bullying inclinations as well as those who are being victimized by cyber-bullies.

The survey also questioned whether community members take cyber-bullying seriously. Over 55% favourably agree on some level that community members take cyber-bullying seriously. However, a non-trivial number of participants also felt that their community does not take cyber-bullying seriously with 20% in disagreement, including 25% of the sample who were unsure of whether cyber-bullying is taken seriously in their community. This finding is interesting when consideration is paid to the fact that the same sample struggled to account for whether cyber-bullying is an issue in their community (see Table 2).

As the majority of respondents perceive politicians to be treating the issue of cyber-bullying not as seriously as they should, a crosstab was employed to capture this perception. In

particular, it would be necessary to assess whether one's previous experience tarnishes or makes them more critical of political figures. Similar to previous analyses in this section regarding the role of previous victimization and one's perception of cyber-bullying as a problem, Table 6 explores whether victimization influences one's view on politicians.

Table 6  
*Perception of political action and prior bullying victimization*

	Cyber-bullying is Taken Seriously by Politicians					Total
	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Exposure to bullying						
No	--	1 (16.7%)	2 (33.3%)	1 (16.7%)	2 (33.3%)	6
Yes	4 (30.8%)	1 (7.7%)	1 (7.7%)	1 (7.7%)	6 (46.2%)	13
Total	4 (21.1%)	2 (10.5%)	3 (15.8%)	2 (10.5%)	8 (42.1%)	19

Table 6 seeks to expound whether certain participants are more likely grapple with the level of concern that politicians have with the issue of cyber-bullying. The majority of the sample remains critical of the political response to cyber-bullying. This is especially true for individuals who have prior bullying victimization, but also for those who report not being bullied. However, the participants who report not being exposed to bullying were more likely to disagree with the level of seriousness that politicians exhibit. Only one participant agreed that politicians take cyber-bullying seriously and that participant was not exposed to bullying.

Comparatively, almost half of the participants who have been exposed to bullying either somewhat agree or agree that politicians take cyber-bullying seriously. While the majority perceives politicians as lacking genuine concern for cyber-bullying, a significant number of participants who were victimized perceive politicians to be taking the issue more seriously compared to participants who have little exposure to cyber-bullying. Although this sample size is small and lacks statistical power, Table 6 is indicative of a more serious problem concerning the



possibility that the public is more cynical of politicians, including more distrustful of the political system in general. Incorporating how the participants perceive the level of seriousness taken by politicians, it will be interesting to see how the participants feel about enacting legislation specifically to target traditional bullying and bullying as a result of the use of technology.

### **Should Special Laws be Introduced?**

Given the participants' strong views on politicians, the researcher was interested in probing views on the role of cyber-bullying legislation. Participants were asked how strongly they felt about enacting laws against bullying. Participants were also asked whether special laws should be introduced specifically targeting cyber-bullying or bullying that involves the use of technology or social media. Table 7 provides the results to these questions.

Table 7  
*Laws against bullying and cyber-bullying*

	1 (not strongly)	2	3	4	5	6 (very strongly)
How strongly do you feel that there should be laws against bullying	5%	5%	--	5%	10%	75%
How strongly do you feel that there should be special laws against cyber-bullying or bullying that involves technology or social media	5%	10%	5%	5%	10%	65%

The sample very strongly agrees (75%) that there should be laws against bullying. Although the participants are overwhelming in agreement for laws against bullying, the next statement contains more diverse perspectives. The majority of the sample (65%) very strongly agreed to the inclusion of special laws against cyber-bullying or bullying involving the use of technology or social media. The responses pertaining to this statement contains a diverse distribution across the scale. A lack of statistical power results limits the ability to determine

whether these differences are statistically significant. However, twenty percent of participants rated the need for special laws against cyber-bullying as something they did not feel strongly about, versus only 10% of those who rated the need for laws for bullying as something they did not feel strongly about. As noted previously, the majority of the participants strongly agree that laws should be implemented against bullying and cyber-bullying.

Not only did the sample opt for laws against bullying and cyber-bullying, they also believe stakeholders should be taking more action to prevent cyber-bullying from occurring in the first place. Table 8 explores how strongly the participants feel about whether one's community, politicians, employers, school administrators and teachers, parents, social networking websites, and the news media need to take more action to prevent cyber-bullying.

Table 8

*Should stakeholders take more action to prevent cyber-bullying?*

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
Community	50%	25%	15%	--	--	--	10%
Politicians	65%	20%	10%	--	--	--	5%
Employers	65%	15%	10%	--	--	--	10%
School administrators and teachers	60%	20%	15%	5%	--	--	--
Parents	75%	5%	15%	5%	--	--	--
Social networking websites	85%	--	10%	--	5%	--	--
News media	65%	10%	15%	10%	--	--	--

For the most part, the participants felt that stakeholders should take more action in one way or another. The majority selected strongly agreed for each category including: one's community (50%), school administrators and teachers (60%), politicians (65%), employers

(65%), news media (65%), parents (75%), and social networking websites (85%). Table 8 highlights a struggle to determine who should take responsibility for combating cyber-bullying. This struggle was also apparent when participants were asked to define cyber-bullying or to determine whether cyber-bullying was an issue in their community (see Table 2).

The results highlight an important, and often neglected, area of discussion in which stakeholders have a duty to take action. The participants do not feel as though each and every stakeholder is taking enough action in comparison to others. For example, the participants feel more strongly about some stakeholders (e.g. social networking websites and parents) taking action unlike others (e.g. community). Overall, the participants place a significant amount of attention and responsibility on social networking websites to take more action against cyber-bullying. These findings highlight an interesting departure from a neoliberal framework rooted in responsabilizing individuals to reduce their risk of victimization.

Where the neoliberal framework removes responsibility from the state and places responsibility on its citizens, individuals are held responsible for preventing their victimization. This could mean incorporating additional precautions to protect one's privacy online, being careful of who is allowed in one's social network, and choosing not to engage in social media platforms to reduce one's risk of victimization. Those who fail to take responsibility are often blamed for their victimization and failure to reduce one's risk. The government tends to advance a neoliberal agenda to absolve responsibility; however, at the same time, has introduced a few bills under the guise of protecting citizens from cyber-victimization. The current legal response ignores the responsibility of social networking websites and, in turn, is indicative of a more serious concern regarding legislation. Ultimately, there is grey area hampering the public's ability to determine who should be held accountable.

Neoliberalism seeks to decentralize as well as produce a response that is far less coordinated, collaborative, and transparent. In light of this finding, a contradiction occurs in which the public lacks trust in politicians all the while opting for special laws introduced against cyber-bullying. What becomes disconcerting is public ambiguity about legislation, including whether additional provisions are necessary. If the public is unsure about legislation, and wants special legislation enacted, it is easier to pass populist legislation as the public is exhibiting a sense of fear. The government is then able to take advantage of the public who may have a dystopic view of the Internet and technology as well as seeking additional provisions enacted against this technology.

Such a response ignores how the participants feel about social networking sites taking more action, but also want to see special laws introduced against cyber-bullying. The introduction of special legislation fails to account for the overwhelming majority of the sample who wants social networking websites to be held accountable for cyber-bullying that occurs on their platforms. Another area that received conflicting views is cyber-bullying in one's community. The last portion of this section will develop the relationship between those who perceive cyber-bullying as a problem in their community juxtaposed against whether more action is needed in one's community.

Table 9 performs a crosstab to expound participant perceptions regarding the response to cyber-bullying in one's community. These responses were juxtaposed against feelings of whether communities should be better equipped against cyber-bullying. Note that 5 participants were unsure of whether cyber-bullying is an issue in their community and, thereby, unsure of whether their community needs to take further action. Cyber-bullying appears to be a problem in their community as the sample agreed to this statement, but with variation. Communities will have to

present a more coordinated response to garner trust and awareness. Even participants who did not perceive cyber-bullying as a problem in their community favour additional precautions taken against cyber-bullying. While the participants may disagree with whether cyber-bullying is a problem, the participants desire an effective, coordinated, and collaborative response.

Table 9

*Perception of cyber-bullying as a problem in my community and the community's response*  
My Community needs to do more to Prevent Cyber-bullying

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Total
Cyber-bullying is a problem in my community				
Strongly Agree	6 (85.7%)	1 (14.3%)	--	7
Somewhat Agree	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	--	2
Agree	--	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.3%)	3
Disagree	1 (50%)	--	1 (50%)	2
Somewhat Disagree	--	--	1 (100%)	1
Total	8 (53.3%)	4 (26.7%)	3 (20%)	15

Table 9 substantiates the need for public input surrounding the administration of justice, including the role of educating the public with regards to building stronger, intact, and cohesive communities. The fact that the participants felt unsure about cyber-bullying as an issue in their community seems to hint at the fact that more awareness is needed. Although the sample is too small to have statistical power, the amount of unsure responses could signify the consequences of ambiguous legislation. A disaggregated response coupled with the continued ability to enact populist legislation has led to confusion surrounding whether cyber-bullying is a problem and whether communities are equipped to respond effectively.

The GSS (2009) lends support to these findings as younger Canadians report stronger feelings of satisfaction with their personal safety from crime in comparison to older age groups. Older age groups appear to have stronger feelings of dissatisfaction with their personal safety

from crime. Additional research should continue to explore how different demographic groups perceive cyber-bullying, including how one's perception influences their concern regarding the legislative landscape. The GSS (2009) also found women compared to men as well as individuals aged 65 and over to be least satisfied with their personal safety from crime than any other age group. Comparatively, the sample of this thesis consists of an older group of well-educated women. Individuals who report lower levels of satisfaction with their personal safety from crime could be in support of special laws against cyber-bullying.

A potential for fear of technology hints at a trend concerning the ramifications of the current policing and security agenda. Recent efforts consumed with validating a particular discourse tied to bolstering national security will overlook the unique needs of different communities across Canada. When one re-considers the example above regarding politicians, the findings suggest politicians are struggling to maintain a level of trust. Politicians thrive based on being able to successfully propagate their political agenda. A weak public image will damage the public's ability to perceive politicians as honest and legitimate. What becomes more concerning is the fact that politicians have the authority to enact and amend legislation. The participants indicate that there should be laws against bullying and special laws enacted against cyber-bullying. Conversely, the same politicians enacting legislation have failed to garner the trust of these participants. The question becomes does the current political agenda exacerbate a fear of technology.

The results seem to suggest that the participants may have a fear of technology and crime that occurs via these technological platforms. Again, these findings are consistent with a larger study, the GSS (2009), which found younger Canadians to be most satisfied with their safety from crime in comparison to older women, especially women over the age of 65, who were least

satisfied with their safety from crime. What becomes more concerning is the fact that these fears may influence how the participants perceive crime not only locally, but also across Canada. Fear of crime has the potential to intensify considering the sample seems to perceive various stakeholders as failing to take the issue of cyber-bullying seriously. What emerges is a landscape in which legislation is enacted without concern for the current level of political cynicism that individuals feel for their respective politicians. Particular ideologies seem to proliferate while public distrust continues to intensify for some groups. The next section will explore this issue further. An attempt will be made to discuss what this means for understanding the issue of cyber-bullying, followed by another section that provides future considerations and recommendations.

## Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

Mounting concern over the misuse and abuse of information and communication technology has alerted stakeholders, including parents, educators, law enforcement, community services, and the legal apparatus, as to what appropriate action should be taken. This chapter will discuss the main findings of this study, how this study enhances the current state of literature, outline limitations, and provide recommendations for future research. As the proliferation and advancement of technology challenges the ways in which an individual comes to understand their world, there is need to evaluate one's relationship with technology, and the changing legal landscape. This relationship has the potential to shape one's own epistemology and, as a result, these societal changes have also challenged traditional approaches in research.

### Overview of Findings

The primary goal of this study was to provide an alternative approach in the realm of public opinion research. Revisiting the research questions will provide an opportunity to clarify some ambiguity apparent in the current state of research. The questions posed were:

*RQ1: Does the public perceive cyber-bullying as a problem?*

*RQ2: Are stakeholders taking sufficient action against cyber-bullying?*

*RQ3: Should special laws be introduced to deal specifically with cyber-bullying?*

Public opinion research provides a glimpse into the array of conflicting messages muddling the field of cyber-bullying research. Furthermore, public opinion research allows for probing individuals of diverse demographics as a means of mediating gaps in research.

Although the sample size was rather small, the findings substantiate the benefit of public opinion research. Traditional forms of crime prevention are often considered the sole responsibility to be enacted by the criminal justice apparatus. The findings from this study suggest a more collaborative response. Participants of this study perceived present day society as



incapable of preventing individuals from being cyber-bullied or having the measures emplace to deter individuals from cyber-bullying. These findings suggest the need to delve into the deeper processes at work where an individual chooses to cyber-bully another.

**Cyber-bullying as a problem.** The majority of the sample perceives cyber-bullying as a problem in Canada. Although the majority describe cyber-bullying as a problem, disagreement ensued with regards to whether cyber-bullying is an issue in one's community. Fear and anxiety of technology—including the risk for victimization—could explain why the participants were unsure of the problem of cyber-bullying in one's neighbourhood, however, perceived cyber-bullying as an issue in Canada. Confusion is also echoed when participants were asked to describe when bullying should be considered a criminal act. The participants each had a unique response to the question. Variation is indicative of how nuanced cyber-bullying is, and the difficulty reaching public consensus. Overall, the participants may be unsure of legislation enacted against traditional bullying and cyber-bullying; however, further research will need to be conducted to establish this link.

**Stakeholders' response to cyber-bullying.** The question becomes who should be in control of the narrative and should be responsible for introducing special laws against cyber-bullying. When the participants were asked which stakeholders should take more action, the participants felt certain stakeholders need to take more action. Surprisingly, politicians did not make the top of this list. In fact, the participants strongly agreed that social media websites should take more action to prevent cyber-bullying compared to politicians. Political cynicism is a contributing factor as the participants believed politicians are not taking cyber-bullying seriously and should be taking more action to prevent cyber-bullying from becoming a more serious issue in society. Although a small sample size, this study challenges the legislative discourse of late

and encourages a discussion regarding who should be combating the issue of cyber-bullying. Where previous research has looked to the role of schools and laws, perhaps the role of social media websites warrants additional consideration.

**Special laws against cyber-bullying.** It is necessary to revisit the issue of legislation. The majority of the sample strongly agrees that there should be laws against bullying, including special laws against cyber-bullying. However, when the participants were probed to consider whether politicians are taking sufficient action against cyber-bullying, politicians were met with some criticism. Politicians were regarded as less likely to take cyber-bullying as seriously as other stakeholders. Where politicians were greeted with critical treatment from the participants, mental health professionals were regarded in a much more favourable light. Politicians are the individuals elected to advance legislation and policy, which will have an impact on communities both at the local and national levels. This is concerning considering the Government of Canada is seeking to implement additional laws against cyber-crimes, which also includes laws against cyber-bullying.

These findings suggest that there is no clear indication, whether in definition or based on the current legal response, as to who should take responsibility for combating cyber-bullying. While participants believe social networking websites should take more action to reduce the cyber-bullying that occurs on their respective platforms, the participants perceive social networking websites as having a greater responsibility to take action in comparison to politicians. A dichotomy exists in which the participants want special laws against cyber-bullying while perceiving social networking websites as the catalyst for change. If public or private space endured high crime rates, the public would demand more action to be taken. The current legislative response appears to follow a different trajectory online where social networking

websites have been absolved from taking responsibility against cyber-bullying. The participants want social networking websites to have more involvement in this matter.

### **Contribution to Literature**

The goal of this research project sought to provide an alternative perspective to the growing body of cyber-bullying research. The trajectory of cyber-bullying research demonstrates a continuum of ambiguous definitions, inconsistent prevalence rates, and varying methodological approaches. When a concept is not easily recognizable whereby the conceptual characteristics conflicts or contradicts, it becomes rather difficult to identify when a particular behaviour, action, or experience should be regarded as cyber-bullying. The implication of having varying definitions and characteristics attached to a particular concept concerns the ability of fully understand as well as document this particular social phenomena. What becomes interesting is that the majority of this sample has either been subjected to some form of bullying and/or have witnessed someone get bullied at some point in their life. Although the majority has been bullied or know of another individual who was bullied, the majority has not experienced bullying to the extent outlined in the scenarios. When a sample undergoes self-selection, research is less likely to capture a diverse range of perspective, including how a fear of technology, in turn, has the potential to impact one's understanding of cyber-bullying.

Current prevalence rates reported by researchers should be subject to greater scrutiny. Previous research tends to ignore how the 'public' perceives social issues, such as cyber-bullying, by opting for researching very specific subgroups. Although tapping into various subgroups allows for understanding a particular group better, tapping into past experience and varying levels of awareness provides a more balanced approach. For example, researchers conducting studies in the area of cyber-bullying have sought to acquire sample demographics

consisting of adolescents and minors. Research on minors and adolescents provides a wealth of information for many groups ranging from parents to teachers. However, viewing cyber-bullying as a phase within one's youth is destructive to understanding the problem. Criminologists have recognized the construction of crime as mirrored in rhetoric. For youth, they have often been constructed as problematic, unruly, and irrational beings as a way of regulating their behaviour, including the types of consequences youth should face when in the court of law.

This pattern is further aggravated when considering the widespread reliance on inconsistent victimization rates to predict the prevalence of cyber-bullying. For example, these prediction rates often ignore methodological issues. To mediate this gap, the participants were asked whether cyber-bullying is a problem. In the study, the participants felt very strongly that cyber-bullying is an issue in Canada. Conversely, the participants struggled with determining how serious cyber-bullying is in their community. This is an example —although a mere suggestion considering the study's small sample size—attesting to the implications of ambiguous or varying prevalence rates. As a result, research in this area should proceed with caution considering the abundance of mixed messages concerning the scope of cyber-bullying.

Not only is there disconnect surrounding the current approach taken by researchers, but the legislative landscape erodes the public's capacity to participate and challenge the current discourse. This is particularly evident with Bill C-51, which seeks to provide government institutions with the ability to monitor and keep track of citizens with relative impunity. Another concern is the premature need to enact pieces of legislation as quickly as possible while ignoring short-term and long-term consequences. Instead, bills should be enacted after careful consideration through engaging multiple stakeholders. Public opinion can establish the local and global impact of legislative policy.

One consequence of hastily enacted legislation is fear of crime. Schissel (2006) describes a moral panic as being monopolized by individuals with vested interests to ensure their truth claims appear valid. One way to achieve this would be to adopt the label of an “expert.” This study challenges the authority and legitimacy of politicians. For instance, social networking websites were viewed as the “experts” in the fight against cyber-bullying. However, the participants were also in support of special legislation introduced against cyber-bullying. While the participants held other stakeholders to a higher level of accountability, legislation is being enacted in the area of cyber crimes. A plausible explanation of this trajectory centers on notions of risk and how modern society is regarded as becoming increasingly “risky.” The solution often results in the adoption of neoliberal principles. The question becomes whether fear is structured as a symptom normalized in modern risk society (Walklate & Mythen, 2008).

In a risk society, the “expert” revels in the unquestioned authority bestowed upon them (Becker, 1967). Throughout the study, the participants were critical of the political landscape in Canada. The participants went as far as to question the credibility of politicians. Acquiring a level of unquestioned credibility requires a level of trust and legitimacy. This has led scholars to explore how trust impacts fear of crime. Jackson et al. (2009) describe fear of crime as stemming from the erosion of shared norms and values; the loss of interpersonal trust, a sense of community, and neighbourhood cohesion; and, the inability of local structures to exert formal and informal modes of social control. While fear of crime is regarded as the adoption of political discourse, this study also challenges how individuals come to resist political discourse. Further research will need to explore the ways in which people adopt certain political discourses while resisting others (Walklate & Mythen, 2008).

Another element to this study is the role of victimization and fear of crime. While the sample may lack prior experience with cyber-bullying, they felt special legislation should be introduced to combat cyber-bullying. This finding mirrors the GSS (2009) wherein an older Canadian population is less satisfied with their feelings of personal safety. Where the GSS (2009) found victims of crime to be less satisfied with their level of personal safety, the participants of this study were fearful even if lacking previous victimization. A plausible explanation concerns the rapid development of technology and an aging population who exhibits a sense of ambivalence towards technology. A growing sense of ambivalence, and cynicism directed at politicians to sufficient take action, is a key factor contributing to the participants' perception of cyber-bullying as a problem in Canada.

Evidently, critical gaps exist between public opinion and the construction of legislation. A disconnect occurs between the legislation implemented and feelings of personal safety. Moreover, there should be trust for those elected or with the authority to enact change and take action. A macro approach provides a more coordinated response in comparison to traditional modes of crime prevention or the sole reliance on the criminal justice apparatus. Critical media literacy, public discussion of the role of political agendas, and a deeper conversation about the nature of the real problems in Canadian society allows for collaboration and the community mobilization. If public concern arises for a supposed erosion of social bonds, feelings of personal safety will be distorted. Enacted legislation fails to account for these misgivings.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

Efforts were made to deconstruct the current state of cyber-bullying research and how scholars arrive at a definition of cyber-bullying. A possible limitation is a lack of providing a definition to guide this study. Instead, I chose to encompass a definition of cyber-bullying

already conceptualized. Moreover, I wanted the participants to participate in the process of defining cyber-bullying as opposed to setting definitional parameters. This was the crux of the thesis where efforts were made to understand how the public perceives the issue rather than attempting to produce victimization rates or a new definition. As cyber-bullying can happen to anyone, efforts were made to focus less on cyber-bullying as an issue that follows youth. The instrument refers to young people as minors and adolescents when necessary. These steps were taken to elicit the participant's understanding of the issue. Although this approach is unorthodox, the findings of this thesis affirm the advantageousness of public opinion research.

Another limitation concerns sample demographics and size. The sample consists of well-educated, older, white women. Based on these characteristics, the participants may subscribe to a more cynical view of technology, including a fear of technology. Young generations have embraced technology and, as a result, may share a more favourable relationship with technology in comparison to individuals belonging to an older demographic. Researchers should continue to explore the link between fear of technology and how that impacts fear of crime. However, such an approach should seek to capture the significance of technology in modern society and how one's relationship with technology may also impact this very relationship.

Future research has the potential to enhance the current state of literature. A larger sample size allows for determining statistical significance. Additionally, a larger sample size allows for data manipulation and the use of more advanced statistical models. Future research should account for the growing trend of adopting a cell-phone only lifestyle. To be able to tap into these demographics, research will need to restructure how participants are acquired, including an adaptation to increasingly hyper-connected lifestyles. Such an adjustment will ensure that diverse demographic groups have the opportunity to participate in future research.

While combing through participant responses to highlight the point in which cyber-bullying should be considered criminal, an interesting finding emerged. Although the study did not go through any form of qualitative analyses, some open-ended questions were asked. The responses added an enhanced illustration complimenting the study, but were not representative of the sample group. Future research will benefit from mixed-methods and qualitative research, including the area of public opinion research. Such an approach will further illustrate the shifting political discourse in Canada, and how average citizens come to accept or resist these discourses. As the legislative practices of late should be subjected to a more critical evaluation, public opinion research has the potential to provide a framework that allows for shaping policy.

The same political figures the participants mistrust are the same political figures implementing legislation and laws. Public criminology could serve to educate and encourage critical mobilization at the grassroots level. Teaching the public to unite and enact change encourages community efficacy while strengthening social bonds. Reflecting back on this study, the participants felt cyber-bullying was an issue in Canada, but lacked confidence in determining whether cyber-bullying was an issue in their community. While the participants wanted more action from certain stakeholders (e.g. social media websites and parents) in comparison to others (e.g. politicians), they also wanted special legislation enacted against cyber-bullying. To better understand how these processes interlink, providing the necessary tools to educate will also build awareness and understanding. While this study was employed as a conservative test of interest, future research could benefit from surveying larger groups of the Canadian population, including individuals belonging to different communities. The end result will establish whether Canadian public opinion validates or opposes the current political and legislative landscape endorsed by the Government of Canada.



## **Concluding Remarks**

Whether it concerns the virtual sphere or in reality, the political discourse has produced a paradigm shift concerning which measures are adopted to fight crime. The takeaway from this study should challenge how researchers conduct cyber-bullying research, such as by providing an alternative. Public opinion research provides an opportunity to explore how the public feels about particular issues, which in turn can produce fruitful findings benefiting not only individual communities, but also worldwide initiatives. Sometimes these perspectives may challenge the dominating discourse. This study comes at a time when controversial bills, such as Bill C-51, have the potential to change the governance of the online and offline spheres.

In this study, the participants struggled to identify whether cyber-bullying was an issue in their community as well as the rest of Canada. The participants identified that more action is required against cyber-bullying. The participants also agreed that there should be special laws against cyber-bullying. This finding can be contrasted with the fact that the participants perceived politicians as failing to take the issue seriously. If politicians are regarded as incapable of managing what is perceived to be a problem in one's country, the question becomes who then should take responsibility. This research has revealed an area that needs further exploring, and that is the role of social media platforms or websites. In fact, the participants acknowledged that these platforms should take more responsibility for cyber crimes that occur to users who use those platforms. With the current political discourse gearing up to strengthen the criminal justice apparatus, questions remain unanswered with regards to whether the issue is being taken seriously and, if not, what does that reveal about the response?

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## Appendix A: Survey Instrument

### CONSENT

Interview #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Hello, I am from the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. We are conducting a survey under the supervision of Professor's from the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities. We are doing a survey on public opinions regarding some of the stories the media has covered recently on adolescent and young adult suicides and your opinion is really important to us.**

**The survey should only take about 25 minutes.**

**Do you have a few minutes for me to get your opinions on this subject?**

Choose an item.

**Are you 18 years of age or older?**

Choose an item.

**If no...**

**Is there someone in the household who is 18 years of age or older I can speak to?**

Choose an item.

**Great, before we continue, I want to make sure you fully understand the study and then give you a chance to consent.**

Choose an item.

**This study has been reviewed and approved by a UOIT Ethics Review Committee. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, your privacy and confidentiality will be protected. All information you provide in the questionnaire will remain anonymous. Your name will never appear in any report or publication about this study.**

**A number of questions and scenarios have to do with suicide, some of which include sexual violence, which may cause some discomfort. Because of the topic you may feel too upset to answer particular questions relating to suicide. You may also find that the subject matter is a bit upsetting. As a researcher I will try my best to minimize any discomforts. Should you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to not answer a question or withdraw from the study completely. If you decide to participate in the study and then decide to stop participating, you may do so at any time, without explanation, and with no consequences of any kind.**

**Please also note that while any information you share will be confidential, there is a minimal risk of some minor emotional and/or psychological distress caused by recalling past events. Should you become uncomfortable during the interview please remember that you are free to withdraw at any time.**

**I have the contact information for some mental health professionals in our area. If at any time you want this information please let me know. I will provide this information at the end of the survey as well.**

**Do you formally consent to participating in this interview?**

Choose an item.

### **SUICIDE**

**I am going to begin by asking you - what do you think are some of the major causes or factors that lead to suicide among young people? (By this we mean people 21 and under)**

Click here to enter text.

**I am going to read you a number of statements. I would like to know whether you agree or disagree with each statement and how strong that agreement or disagreement is, with 1 being strongly agree and 6 would be strongly disagree, OF COURSE YOU CAN JUST AGREE OR JUST DISAGREE**

Suicide is a problem in my community.

Choose an item.

Suicide is a problem in my country.

Choose an item.

Suicide and feelings of suicide are a form of mental illness.

Choose an item.

Suicide and feelings of suicide are a coping mechanism for highly negative feelings.

Choose an item.

Suicide and feelings of suicide are taken seriously by people in my community.

Choose an item.

Suicide and feelings of suicide are taken seriously by politicians.

Choose an item.

Suicide and feelings of suicide are taken seriously by mental health professionals.

Choose an item.

Suicide and feelings of suicide are taken seriously by school principals and teachers.

Choose an item.

Suicide and feelings of suicide are taken seriously by the news media.

Choose an item.

Schools do enough to address suicide amongst students.

Choose an item.

Our society does enough to prevent people from committing suicide.

Choose an item.

My community needs to do more to prevent suicide.

Choose an item.

Politicians need to do more to prevent suicide.

Choose an item.

Employers need to do more to prevent suicide.

Choose an item.

School administrators and teachers need to do more to prevent suicide.

Choose an item.

Parents need to do more to prevent suicide.

Choose an item.

Social networking sites needs to do more to prevent suicide.

Choose an item.

The news media needs to do more to prevent suicide.

Choose an item.

Which age group do you think is at the highest risk of suicide?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

## SENARIOS

**I am now going to read you a few scenarios based on cases that have appeared in the media and I am going to ask you for your opinions and thoughts on them,. NOTE ALL OF THESE ARE FICTIONAL.**

### SENARIO ONE

*Jake, a heterosexual man and George, a homosexual man move into a university dorm as roommates. Jake sets up a webcam to spy on George. Jake uses social media and mutual acquaintances to publicize George's intimate relationship with another man. George is very upset that his personal life has been broadcast publicly by Jake for all to see. George commits suicide.*

What do you feel may have led to this young person's suicide?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

What aspects of the scenario do you find troubling?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

**I am going to read you a number of statements. With each statement, please indicate on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not troubling; 5 being somewhat troubling; and 10 being very troubling, how troubling you find each aspect of the scenario. WE ARE GOING TO USE THIS SCALE THROUGHOUT ALL OF THE SENARIOS. IF YOU NEED ME TO REMIND YOU WHAT THE SCALE IS PLEASE JUST ASK.**

How troubling is it that it involved the use of social media or technology?

Choose an item.

How troubling is it that it involved homophobia?

Choose an item.

### SENARIO TWO

*Jane is a high school student. One weekend Jane goes to a party. Jane consumes enough alcohol that she repeatedly vomits and passes in and out of consciousness. At the party, 4 male students rape Jane and take photos and videos of the rape. After the party, pictures and videos of the rape circulate throughout social media and the social circles of everyone involved. Jane is relentlessly harasses, bullied, and sexually propositioned by strangers. Months later Jane commits suicide.*

What do you feel is the most troubling aspect of this story?

Click here to enter text.

What do you feel may have led to the young person's suicide?

Click here to enter text.

**NOW I AM GOING TO ASK YOU JUST LIKE IN THE PRESIOUS SENARIO, how troubling you find each aspect of this scenario.**

How troubling is it that it involved social media or technology?

Choose an item.

How troubling is it that it involved sexual assault??

Choose an item.

### SENARIO THREE

*Mitch is a disabled person. One day he was mugged by one of his school peers, Seymour. Seymour was subsequently arrested. Afterwards, Seymour's friends relentlessly harassed Mitch. Mitch was going to have to testify about the incident around the same time the new school year started. Around this time, Mitch committed suicide.*

What do you feel is the most troubling aspect of this story?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

What do you feel may have led to the young person's suicide?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

**NOW I AM GOING TO ASK YOU JUST LIKE IN THE PREVIOUS SENARIO, how troubling you find each aspect of this scenario.**

How troubling WOULD THIS INCIDENT HAVE BEEN IF IT HAD is it that it involved social media or technology?

Choose an item.

How troubling is it that it involved a CRIME AGAINST disabled person?

Choose an item.

JUST A REMINDER, IF YOU NEED TO KNOW SCALE AGAIN JUST ASK

#### **SENARIO FOUR**

*Mary, a teenage girl, is a huge fan of social media. After a few months of being online, Mary was repeatedly teased online about her weight and her looks. People left a number of nasty comments on every photo she posted. Mary closed her accounts and opened up new ones, but the harassment continued to follow her. Afterwards, she committed suicide.*

What do you feel is the most troubling aspect of this story?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

What do you feel may have led to the young person's suicide?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

**NOW I AM GOING TO ASK YOU JUST LIKE IN THE PREVIOUS SENARIO, how troubling you find each aspect of this scenario.**

How troubling is it that it involved social media or technology?

Choose an item.



How troubling is it that in involved an INCIDENT IS BASED ON SOMEONES APPERANCE?

Choose an item.

### SENARIO FIVE

*Serah is a high school student. During the first week of school, she caught the attention of a group of other students who were of a different ethnicity than her. This group of students harassed and intimidated Serah because of her different ethnicity. After months of harassment, both physical and verbal, Serah committed suicide.*

What do you feel is the most troubling aspect of this story?

Click here to enter text.

What do you feel may have led to the young person's suicide?

Click here to enter text.

**NOW I AM GOING TO ASK YOU JUST LIKE IN THE PRESIOUS SENARIO, how troubling you find each aspect of this scenario.**

How troubling WOULD THIS INCIDENT HAVE BEEN IF IT HAD involved social media or technology??

Choose an item.

How troubling is it that it involved race?

Choose an item.

### REVISIT SENARIOS

**Thinking back to the scenarios I presented you a few minutes ago... I have another question to ask you.**

In scenario 1, where George was spied on by his roommate who broadcast George's intimate relationship on the internet...should what happened to George be considered traditional bullying or cyberbullying?

Choose an item.

**If yes...**

Is the fact that it may involve [traditional bullying or cyberbullying] more important, the same in importance, or less in importance than the incident may have involved homophobia?

Choose an item.

In scenario 2, where Jane was raped at a party and the pictures of the rape spread on social media and she was harassed about it....should what happened to Jane be considered traditional bullying or cyberbullying?

Choose an item.

**If yes...**

Is the fact that it may involve [traditional bullying or cyberbullying] more important, the same in importance, or less in importance than the incident may have involved rape?

Choose an item.

In scenario 3, where Mitch was mugged and then harassed about coming forward about the incident...should what happened to Mitch be considered traditional bullying or cyberbullying?

Choose an item.

**If yes...**

Is the fact that it may involve [traditional bullying or cyberbullying] more important, the same in importance, or less in importance than the incident may have involved an attack on a disabled person?

Choose an item.

In scenario 4, where Mary was harassed about her weight and looks throughout various social media accounts...should what happened to Mary be considered traditional bullying or cyberbullying?

Choose an item.

**If yes...**

Is the fact that it may involve [traditional bullying or cyberbullying] more important, the same in importance, or less in importance than the incident may have involved an incident based on one's appearance?

Choose an item.

In scenario 5, where Serah was harassed and intimidated because of her ethnicity...should what happened to Serah be considered traditional bullying or cyberbullying?

Choose an item.

**If yes...**

Is the fact that it may involve [traditional bullying or cyberbullying] more important, the same in importance, or less in importance than the incident may have involved racism?

Choose an item.

## BULLYING

**Now I want to ask you some questions regarding legislation and law enforcement. I am going to read you a number of statements. With each statement, please indicate on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not strongly; 5 being somewhat strongly; and 10 being very strongly, how strongly you feel about each statement.**

How strongly do you feel that there should be laws against bullying?

Choose an item.

How strongly do you feel that there should be special laws against cyberbullying or bullying that involves technology or social media?

Choose an item.

**On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not seriously; 5 being somewhat seriously; and 10 being very seriously; how seriously do you think society should take cases that involve young people and the following things:**

Bullying

Choose an item.

Cyberbullying

Choose an item.

Homophobia

Choose an item.

Rape

Choose an item.

Racism

Choose an item.

Disability

Choose an item.

**Now I am going to ask you some questions about bullying.**

Do you think that bullying is part of normal childhood? i.e. a normal part of development and growing up?

Choose an item.

**AT WHAT POINT DOES BULLYING GO BEYOND WHAT IS CONSIDERED TRADITIONAL BULLYING?**

Click here to enter text.

How common do you think severe, prolonged bullying is?

Click here to enter text.

At what point does bullying become criminal?

Click here to enter text.

Have you ever been bullied by someone before?

Choose an item.

Have you ever witnessed someone bully someone else? Or know of someone who has?

Choose an item.

If yes, what did you do?

Click here to enter text.

Which age group do you think is at the highest risk of bullying?

Click here to enter text.

Throughout the course of one's life, where do you think someone is bullied the most?

Click here to enter text.

In a school setting, where do you think bullying takes place the most?

Click here to enter text.

**Do you have any experience with anyone you know being harmed in any of the ways we have described in the scenarios?**

Choose an item.

If yes, please describe.

Click here to enter text.

**I am going to read you a number of statements. I would like to know whether you agree or disagree with each statement and how strong that agreement or disagreement is, with 1 being strongly agree and 6 would be strongly disagree, OF COURSE YOU CAN JUST AGREE OR JUST DISAGREE**

Cyber bullying is a problem in my community.

Choose an item.

Cyber bullying is a problem in my country.

Choose an item.

Cyber bullying is taken seriously by people in my community.

Choose an item.

Cyber bullying is taken seriously by politicians.

Choose an item.

Cyber bullying is taken seriously by mental health professionals.

Choose an item.

Cyber bullying is taken seriously by school principals and teachers.

Choose an item.

Schools do enough to address cyber bullying amongst students.

Choose an item.

Our society does enough to prevent people from becoming cyber bullies.

Choose an item.

My community needs to do more to prevent cyber bullying.

Choose an item.

Politicians need to do more to prevent cyber bullying.

Choose an item.

Employers need to do more to prevent cyber bullying.

Choose an item.

School administrators and teachers need to do more to prevent cyber bullying.

Choose an item.

Parents need to do more to prevent cyber bullying.

Choose an item.

Social networking sites needs to do more to prevent cyber bullying.

Choose an item.

The news media needs to do more to prevent cyber bullying.

Choose an item.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

**In order to finish up our survey we would like to ask a few questions about yourself.**

**What year were you born in?**

Click here to enter text.

**Are you male, female, or transgendered?**

**ADD PREFER NOT TO DISCLOSE**

Choose an item.

**What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

Click here to enter text.

**What is your best estimate of your family or household income before deductions from all sources during the past 12 months? Was your household income...**

Choose an item.

**From which the following sources do you receive your information about current events?  
Please rank the top 3 of the following sources:**

Television	
Radio	
Newspapers/Magazines	
Online Newspapers/Magazines	
Internet blogs or other internet commentary	
Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.)	
Friends/Acquaintances/Relatives	
Co-workers	
Other	

Click here to enter text.

**Should you feel the need to speak with a mental health professional please contact UOIT's counselling centre at 905-721-3037 or Durham Mental Health at either 905-666-0483 or 1-800-742-1890**

DO YOU WANT INFO FROM HEALTH COUNCELLORS? ARE YOU OKAY?

**Thank you so much for your time. Your input is greatly appreciated and valued.**