

Framing cyberbullying in US mainstream media

Introduction

This study explores cyberbullying coverage in the US mainstream media through content analysis. Bullying can be defined as aggressive, typically repetitive behavior among school-aged children that conveys a real or perceived power imbalance (Pepler & Craig, 2009). Likewise, cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology: cell-phones, computers and social media (Vandebosch & VanCleemput, 2009). Present research suggests that cyberbullying can be more insidious than offline bullying because it is more difficult to escape; it can take place in addition to regular bullying, providing bullies with unlimited access to the victim, a wider audience to witness the humiliation and a persistent digital record (Katz, 2012). Cyberbullying has negative effects on school performance and children's self-esteem, which can later result in substance abuse and other forms of maladaptive behavior (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). Although cyberbullying is defined as behavior involving school-age children, the term has been applied to cases where adults have harassed children; and to cases with college students, which this research will address too. Most recent statistics available from the National Center for Education Statistics show an increasing trend in the number of cyberbullying cases. In the academic year 2006-2007, 3.7% of students between the ages 12 and 18 were cyberbullied; whereas in the year 2008-2009, 6% reported to have been cyberbullied ("National Center for Education Statistics, 2011").

This research implements a content analysis of US mainstream print and TV coverage to explore how cyberbullying has been framed from 2006-2013, primarily in terms of who and

what causes cyberbullying (causal responsibility) and which individuals, institutions and policies are responsible for taking care of the issue (treatment responsibility). Despite the rising frequency of this phenomenon, to this author's best knowledge, apart from several studies examining individual bullying cases (Ryalls, 2012; Thom et al., 2011; Batacharya, 2004) a content-analysis of this kind has not yet been conducted. Based on research on episodic and thematic framing (Iyengar, 1990), this study hypothesized that TV coverage is more likely to be episodic in nature- triggered by individual cyberbullying incidents- than the print coverage. Episodic frames focus attention on individuals rather than institutions or broader social forces, which are typically present in thematic frames. When issues are framed episodically audiences tend to attribute causal and treatment responsibility for issues to individuals involved in these incidents and not to institutions and society (Iyengar, p. 26). Stories focusing on cyberbullying incidents would lead the audience to attribute responsibility for cyberbullying to characteristics or behavioral problems of individuals involved without understanding broader cultural and social factors at play. Secondly, the study explored whether TV coverage was more likely to attribute causal responsibility directly to technology than the print coverage. Cyberbullying literature shows that when parents blame technology they tend to restrict children's access to various platforms, which does not solve the problem (Katz, 2012). On the contrary, it increases the likelihood that the child will not speak to the parent about a cyberbullying incident for the fear of being denied access to technology, which tends to aggravate the problem.

Literature review

Cyberbullying literature

Most of the literature on cyberbullying comes outside of the field of communication. However, by demonstrating ways in which frames can influence public opinion, literature from the field of communication plays an important role in explaining how the public can perceive this new phenomenon, and which policies it might support. Although there is no single agreed-upon definition of cyberbullying (Vandenbosch & Van Cleemput, 2010), similar to offline bullying, it is defined as “willful and repeated harm inflicted” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p.5) towards another person. A distinctive feature of cyberbullying, is that it involves electronic communication as a means to embarrass, harass, or socially-exclude (Michna, Saini & Solomon, 2009). While offline bullying was considered to be a school-based problem (Pepler & Craig, 2008) and therefore primarily schools’ responsibility, electronic communication tools are dispersing the problem into digital realm where it is not clear which individuals and institutions are responsible, both legally and morally, for taking care of this issue. Even though there are disagreements about the prevalence of cyber-bullying between research based on self-reporting and indirect measurement (Vandenbosch & VanCleemput, 2010), recent studies in different countries repeatedly show an increase in appearance of cyberbullying across various age groups (Katz, 2012, Pew Research Center, 2010). Reported incidents include: hurtful information on the internet; unwanted contact via e-mail, instant and text messaging; and purposeful exclusion from an online community (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012, Vandenbosch & VanCleemput, 2010). Two distinct aspects of cyberbullying that are often emphasized in literature are the fact that often victims of offline bullying are the retaliatory perpetrators of

cyberbullying; and the ability to mask one's identity in the online world (anonymity) is a contributing factor to cyberbullying which emboldens and desensitizes the perpetrator (Katz, 2012, Vandebosch & VanCleemput, 2010, Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004, Berson & Ferron, 2002). Studies show that children's unwillingness to speak of cyberbullying to their parents is a major issue in treatment and prevention (Slonje & Smith, 2008, O'Connell, Price & Barrow, 2004). While cyberbullying increases in middle school, it reaches a peak, so called "perfect storm" period (Katz, 2012) at the age between 14 and 15, which suggests that this phase should be anticipated and tackled in advance: "now is when cyberbullying peaks, sexual bullying is common and young people say they are least likely to follow the e-safety guidelines they have been taught" (Ibid. p. 71). Some studies suggest that boys and girls have equal chances of being victimized (Slonje & Smith, 2007), while others find that girls are more likely to engage in cyberbullying and be victimized (Li, 2007). Experts have different views on best responses to cyberbullying (Byron, 2008). A growing problem in this respect is the ubiquity of technology ownership and children's ability to access it outside of parental supervision- for instance 82% of 10-11 year olds and 97% of 14-15 year-olds own a cell-phone, while 30% of the former and 42% of the latter say they can go online at a friend's place without parental supervision (Katz, 2012). Most recent cyberbullying prevention and treatment policy studies focus on school-age children and propose programs where treatment responsibility engages parents, schools as institutions, teachers as individuals and children (participants in incidents). While some call for legislation, others point out that cyberbullying legislation seriously clashes with freedom of speech; introduces legal confusion among plethora of laws covering slander and libel; and most importantly, fails to eradicate the problem (Meredith, 2010, Popkin, 2009).

Framing literature

This research primarily relies on the definition of framing as a selection of certain content in the media and the attribution of salience to some information and aspects of content over others (Entman, 1993). Salience implies making a piece of information “more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to the audiences” (Entman, p. 53). According to Entman, frames “define problems,” “diagnose causes” “make moral judgments” and “suggest remedies” (1993). While this study relies on Entman’s and some other authors’ (Chong & Druckman, 2007) proposition that salience effect or increased accessibility should be discussed under the concept of framing, others (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) prefer to keep the distinction between concepts of priming and framing, relating accessibility effect to the former and applicability to the latter. Priming refers to “changes in standards that people use to make political evaluations” (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). By calling attention to some information while ignoring other, media influence the standards people use to evaluate political actors, institutions and policies. Authors who argue for a distinction relate priming to the process of heightened accessibility as a consequence of an issue receiving a lot of attention in the news; while they associate framing to applicability effect, which takes place when a message makes connections between concepts that might not necessarily be related, but the audience accepts the connection upon exposure to the message – for instance between a tax policy and rate of unemployment (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Framing occurs on several levels and the first level, also known as “frame building” is at the level of public discourse (Scheufele & Scheufele, 2011, Gamson, 1992, Johnston & Noakes, 2005). It refers to the process of news production, or how different interest groups or politicians might influence journalists’ construction of stories (Scheufele & Scheufele, 2011). Shoemaker

and Reese (1996) list a wide range of factors that define journalistic practice, and in turn influence news selection.

The second level of framing, commonly referred to as “frame-setting” is concerned with cognitive frames that journalists rely on when producing the content (Scheufele & Scheufele, 2011, p. 112). Just like audiences, journalists have perceptual biases and will focus on some information while neglecting other. Frame-setting studies analyze factors that influence this process and how they are manifested in news coverage (Gitlin, 1980, Entman, 1991; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). This study looks for features of cyberbullying described in this literature review and considers them as frames that are either present in or absent from the coverage, analyzing implications behind such media choices for audiences’ understanding of cyberbullying.

Individual frames found in texts can be divided into journalist and issue frames (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Journalist frames refer to story types that stem from journalistic news values, which DeVreese (2001) refers to as “generic frames.” “Issue specific frames,” on the other hand, characterize specific events. Iyengar’s (1990) division between thematic and episodic framing refers to journalist or generic frames; whereas Nelson and Oxley’s 1999 experiment is a pertinent example of applying issue-specific frames (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). This cyberbullying study provides an analysis of both types of frames.

The third level of framing research deals with the effects of individuals’ exposure to news frames and could be termed as “media effects approach” (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Price et al., 1997; Iyengar 1990). This line of research explores the impact of media framing on recipients’ schemas, attitudes, emotions and decisions. Audience schemas are cognitive representations of objects in relation to other objects (Scheufele & Scheufele, 2011). This study is limited to a content analysis and will not include a follow-up survey or experiment to test the

frame-setting effects; however, the significance of conducting a content analysis hinges on the ability of media framing to impact the creation of cognitive frames within audiences.

Episodic vs. Thematic Frames

Most Americans do not possess enough information about political events or issues (Iyengar, 1994; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). In an effort to understand the plethora of information that they receive on a daily basis, “individuals simplify [political] issues by reducing them to questions of responsibility [and hence] the paramount task of public opinion research is to determine how people attribute responsibility for political issues” (Iyengar, 1994, p. 8). Even though cyberbullying is not strictly a political issue, this study justifies borrowing from political communication literature because public opinion on cyberbullying can influence educational policies at the state and federal level, such as in the case of suicide of 14 year-old Megan Meier in the state of Missouri, which resulted in state legislation.

Episodic news frames focus on “specific episodes, individual perpetrators, victims or other actors at the expense of more general, thematic information [...] and depict concrete events that illustrate issues while thematic framing presents collective or general evidence” (Iyengar, 1994, p.5). Many studies establish the prevalence of episodic frames in TV news, which some scholars term as “fragmented” coverage (Bennett, 2008; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980). On the basis of these findings, this study hypothesizes that TV coverage will be more episodic than print coverage. The most important implication behind episodic framing is that it triggers attributions of responsibility where both cause and treatment of problems are directed at individuals rather than at society, policies, institutions and culture. Such framing tends to make particular acts or characteristics of individuals reported more accessible, while thematic reporting helps viewers to think about issues in terms of societal and cultural factors and policy outcomes

(Iyengar, 1994). Episodic framing, therefore, leads to blaming the poverty on the poor, rather than on government policies, social conditions and cultural tendencies.

Also important for this study is the notion of cultural congruence. Culture can be defined as a set of common frames that are manifest in the discourse and thinking of most people within a society or a social group (Entman, 2004). The most successful frames are the ones that have “the greatest intrinsic capacity to arouse similar responses among most Americans” and “are fully congruent with schemas habitually used by most members of the society” (Entman, 2004, p. 14). News frames are typically adopted only if they resonate with the audience’s long-term schemas. In other words, persuasive frames are those that are culturally congruent (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). In this study, the notion of freedom of speech is expected to be particularly culturally resonant in the context of the First Amendment and its conflict with censoring cyberbullying; therefore the discussion of cyberbullying should be congruent for both journalists and audiences, which might result in a greater frequency of coverage for this frame.

Hypotheses and research questions

This study relies on content analysis to answer the following research questions (RQs) and hypotheses:

- RQ1: Has the frequency of cyberbullying coverage increased over the past seven years along with an increase of self-reported cyberbullying incidents discussed in the literature review? Or does the coverage spike in response to cyberbullying incidents that result in suicides or court cases?

Based on communication literature on episodic and thematic framing, this study hypothesizes:

- Hypothesis 1: The TV population would contain more stories that are driven by individual cyberbullying incidents, which is a characteristic of episodic framing.
- Hypothesis 2: Likewise, the study further proposes that stories in the TV population would be more likely to attribute causal attribution to participants in individual incidents.
- Hypothesis 3: The study also proposes that TV population is more likely to attribute causal responsibility to technology directly, since episodic framing is by definition less explanatory than thematic framing. Therefore this coverage would be more likely to attribute causal responsibility to technology only, without going into a refined analysis as to how these factors interplay with other circumstances behind cyberbullying.
- RQ2: Finally, the content analysis looks into whether there has been a difference in: a) attribution of treatment responsibility between the print and TV populations b) and framing of cyberbullying based on cyberbullying literature. For instance, research shows that cyberbullying can have more insidious effects than offline bullying because the victim cannot escape harassment by leaving school: taunting is present on home computers and on cell/smart phones. Is this finding, among others described in the methods section, more likely to be reported in print or TV media and how does it influence the overall framing of cyberbullying debate?

Method

Sampling

Content analysis included the entire population of print stories and TV transcripts where any of the following search terms, used to describe cyberbullying in literature, appeared: “cyberbull* OR “cyberbull*” OR “cyber bull*” OR “online bullying” OR “electronic bullying” OR “electronic social cruelty.” The population did not contain opinion pieces and magazines. It spans dates between January 1st 2006 and December 31, 2012. The dates were chosen to include the time before some of the cases that garnered a lot of media attention had happened (for instance the case of suicide of Megan Meier, triggered by a cyberbullying incident, which happened in October 2006, but received media attention only after subsequent court case in 2008; and the case of suicide of Tyler Clementi in 2010. The goal with such sampling was to gain insight into how coverage of cyberbullying might change in response to these cyberbullying-related incidents with tragic denouements. If the frequency of cyberbullying coverage increases primarily in response to cyber-bullying incidents, this finding should be another indicator of episodic nature of the coverage.

FACTIVA-based search yielded a total of 775 results, excluding duplicates. In print: 266 articles for the following newspapers: The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and USA Today, which were chosen as representative of the US mainstream print media based on previous influential media studies that considered them as agenda setters (Entman, 2004; Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston, 2007); as well as based on their high circulation.

As for the TV population, FACTIVA search for the same time period yielded a total of 509 TV transcripts, excluding duplicates. ABC, NBC and CBS represented the network channels; FOX and CNN channels represented the cable news and although MSNBC was included in the search, FACTIVA did not provide any results for this channel.

The unit of analysis was the entire story or TV transcript. Inter-coder reliability included three sets of 25 newspaper articles and 25 TV transcripts before the following average level of agreement for all variables was attained: for print: Krippendorff's Alpha 0.883; and 0.881 for TV.

Content analysis

When it comes to causal responsibility, this content analysis sought to capture the main factors behind cyberbullying discussed in these news stories, relying primarily on Iyengar's definition of framing as attribution of responsibility. All frames below were defined on the basis of cyberbullying literature discussed in the literature review section. The first one was "children or participants in an incident," a factor coded every time a story discussed individuals' motives or behavior as causal factors behind a particular incident. This code was also captured every time cyberbullying behavior of both perpetrators and victims was ascribed to human nature and when cyberbullying was discussed as an expected form of behavior based on an age group. For example: "Jalen Fisher [student] admits he used to be a cyberbully. He would post mean comments about fellow classmates on Twitter. Sometimes his posts included unflattering pictures. 'I would say horrible things' [...] 'It was just a lot of anger bottled up inside me.'" (The Washington Post, March 3, 2011). Or the following examples: 1. "I think you can be a 10-year-old little girl that sings her favorite song on YouTube and the first comment there will be: 'You suck, you can't sing, go kill yourself now.' This has nothing to with politics. It has to do with the basic instincts of human nature." (CNN, Reliable Sources, April 8, 2007). 2. "As if my daughter

would have killed herself with a gun, they [cyberbullies] loaded the gun for her.” (CNN, Anderson Cooper 360, November 16, 2007). 3. “She was being bullied because she was pretty and people were just jealous” (CBS News: The Early Show, January 27, 2010). 4. “Honestly the girls are the most vicious. [...] If it’s over a boy, many times they will make sure that they make the other girl’s life miserable, in any way, whether it’s texting, whether it’s spreading rumors through the Facebook, whatever it may be, that’s what they’re set for.” (CNN Headline News, February 9, 2010). 5. “Whether it’s stealing or bullying, taking advantage of the little guy has always existed. Now it's simply jumped from the playground to cyberspace.” (CBS News The Early Show, July 14, 2008).

The second code was “parents, primary caregivers, parental or family values,” which refers to any mention of these factors as causes behind cyberbullying, for instance, lack of parental supervision. The third code was “technology,” which was captured only when the story would openly blame technology for inciting a form of behavior that would not otherwise be there, for instance: “the internet [...] is motivating a lot of kids to be meaner” (USA Today, July 15, 2008). Or the following three examples: 1. “Technology has created some very unique problems right now.” (The Wall Street Journal, August 11, 2010) 2. “Without question, the nature of adolescent peer aggression has evolved due to the proliferation of information and communications technology.” (The Washington Post, September 2, 2010) 3. “There’s something about the Internet that can bring out meanness in teenagers.” (The Washington Post, November 9, 2011).

The fourth factor was titled “societal or cultural tendencies,” and it captures any discussion that mentions how culture, defined as socially acceptable behavior or culturally-embedded attitudes and norms might contribute to cyberbullying. The following examples illustrate it well:

“Well, I think that we need to look at our culture. We have a violent culture. We have an extreme culture of winners and losers. And we have a very competitive culture and we’re pressuring our kids and we’re losing that connection, that human beingness early on and we lose them as they move in to adolescents.” (CNN: American Morning, April 9, 2008). 2. “We have to raise the question about the culture. Does Hollywood, for example, glorify teenage bitchiness? That’s really what it is.” (CNN Headline News, February 12, 2010).

Anonymity as a facilitating factor behind cyberbullying was the fifth factor that was captured and it refers to the fact that it is easier to engage in cyberbullying without dealing with the victim physically and without in-person confrontation. Anonymity facilitates victims’ engagement in cyberbullying as a form of revenge for offline bullying. Moreover, because of anonymity and lack of in-person communication, it is harder for participants to perceive that they are inflicting pain upon another person (Mishna, 2012).

Treatment responsibility

Following Iyengar’s definition of treatment responsibility as well as treatment procedures prescribed in cyberbullying literature, this variable captures the attribution of responsibility for either resolving the consequences of existing cyberbullying cases; or preventing other cases from happening via any of the following: education, introduction of technology (typically monitoring software), or legislative changes. In other words: who is responsible for stopping cyberbullying from happening or for preventing future cases? The content analysis registered whether any of the following were said to be responsible: “parental guidance or monitoring”; 2. “parental introduction of technological solutions (typically software, to monitor children)”; 3. “teachers as individuals”; 4. “schools as institutions (including Boards and school districts)”; 5. “schools implementing technology,” referring to any mention of these as responsible for implementing

technology, typically software, for dealing with cyberbullying; 6. “federal government”; 7. “state government”; 8. “websites /hosting platforms,” as responsible for taking offensive content down; 9. “judiciary system or courts,” was the code that referred to any discussion about a particular case being handled or described as “should be handled” in any type of court (district to federal).

Trigger for the story and frames

Whether the story was triggered by an individual cyberbullying incident or not was the code used to determine if the story was episodic. To be classified as “triggered by an individual incident” the occasion for the story had to be an individual cyberbullying case at any point of its development- whether as a first time reporting or a follow-up. To be considered as “triggered by an individual incident” the story had to revolve around the incident. In other words, there would not have been a story unless there was an incident. It was not sufficient for a story to use the incident merely as a segue-way to a thematic discussion on cyberbullying or to pull the reader/viewer in and continue to discuss cyberbullying as an issue.

Finally, based on cyberbullying literature, specific frames were captured to determine the context in which cyberbullying was discussed. The unit of analysis for capturing frames was also an entire story or a transcript and a frame was captured regardless of its location in the story. All frames applicable were captured regardless of whether they appeared in the lead or in another place in the story since the analysis does *not* discriminate between dominant and counter frames (Entman, 1993). The following frames were captured: 1. “Cyberbullying can lead to suicide and/or depression” –typically associated with all the incidents that garnered media attention precisely because they resulted in suicide; 2. “Difficulty in assigning treatment responsibility”-- because cyberbullying does not always happen on school computers or premises, it is hard to determine who has the right to intervene. 3. “Cyberbullying is worse than bullying because of

ubiquity and anonymity”- the victim is not free from bullies anywhere in the online world or on cell-phones and the inability to know who the tormentor is creates additional problems; 5. “cyberbullying is prevalent among girls” refers to research findings that cyberbullying is framed in the media as a “mean girls” phenomenon (Ryalls, 2012), which is not always backed in cyberbullying literature- there is no consensus on whether it is more prevalent among girls.

Results

The frequency of stories in both print and TV populations does not seem to follow the gradual annual increasing pattern that cyberbullying studies surveyed in the literature review reveal. What increases the frequency of coverage in both populations is the dramatic nature (typically resulting in a suicide) of individual cases. Table 1 listed in the appendix shows the annual distribution of stories across both populations. The coverage peaks in 2010 (60 in print and 128 stories in TV). Spikes in coverage are driven by suicide cases and subsequent court cases such as those of Megan Meier, Phoebe Prince and Tyler Clementi.

Forty-seven percent of the total number of stories are driven by individual cyberbullying incidents. The first hypothesis, which stated that more TV stories than print ones would be triggered by individual cyberbullying incidents, was confirmed: 59.2% of TV stories were episodic, in comparison to 22.3% of print stories. The difference is significant at $p < 0.001$ level.ⁱ

The second hypothesis tested the second indicator of the episodic nature of the coverage: TV stories were more likely than print stories to attribute causal responsibility to individuals involved in cyberbullying incidents. This hypothesis was confirmed as well: 44.1% of TV stories discussed causal responsibility behind cyberbullying in the context of individual blame in comparison to 26% of print stories. This difference was also significant, $p < 0.001$.ⁱⁱ

The third hypothesis tested the third indicator of the episodic nature of the TV coverage by proposing that it would be more likely to attribute causal responsibility to technology directly without providing a wider, multi-faceted context for how technology plays into cyberbullying. This hypothesis, however, was not confirmed. In fact, print stories were more likely to attribute blame to technology: 9.1% of them as opposed to 5.1% within the TV population. The difference is significant, $p < 0.05$.ⁱⁱⁱ Overall, few stories in total discussed technology in this context: 6.5%, which is a welcomed finding, given the potential negative consequences of such framing effects: if the coverage blamed technology, that might lead parents to restrict children's access to technology, which is not an effective form of intervention, according to cyberbullying literature (Katz, 2012).

Finally, the fourth indicator of episodic nature of the coverage was the frequency of mentioning courts as part of treatment responsibility for handling cyberbullying cases. Indeed a court case that resulted from a cyberbullying incident was a common trigger for a cyberbullying-related story that otherwise had little or no discussion of cyberbullying as an issue (outside of the incident itself). This is why discussion of court cases was considered as another indicator of episodic nature of the coverage. While 35.5% of TV stories attributed treatment responsibility to courts, 20% of TV stories mentioned courts in this context, and the difference is significant, $p < 0.001$.^{iv}

Other sources of causal responsibility

Type of causal responsibility that was considered to be indicative of a story's thematic nature was the discussion of cultural and social responsibility behind cyberbullying. What are societal and cultural characteristics that the audience might not be aware of and that may contribute to cyberbullying? For instance, is there a type of behavior propagated in popular culture, such as

reality shows, that cyberbullying among children and students might be modeling? Could it be, then, that society is considering bullying and cyberbullying as necessary evil: “the way things are”? Few stories both in print and TV population discuss the issue, with a slightly higher number of these in print: 4.2% as opposed to 2.9% in TV population. This difference, however, is not significant, $p>0.05$.

Anonymity is often described in cyberbullying literature as a factor that facilitates cyberbullying. Individuals who do not have the courage to bully in person hide behind the technological platform to state their opinions under the veil of anonymity. Furthermore, literature reports that anonymity numbs individuals’ capacity for empathy: when offending another person via technology, the offender does not see in person that they are inflicting harm upon the individual being cyberbullied (Mishna, 2012). Without such feed-back, which might lead harassing behavior to a halt, cyberbullying continues. This causal responsibility is mentioned in 1.9% of print articles and 4.9% of TV transcripts, and the difference is significant, $p<0.05$.^v

Finally, family influences are mentioned in literature as a contributing factor to bullying and cyberbullying- if there is neglect in the family, insufficient supervision or a strained relationship among family members, cyberbullying might go unnoticed both in the case of victims and perpetrators. In print population, 1.1% of articles mention this type of responsibility, in comparison to 4.1% of TV stories that do so; the difference is significant.^{vi}

Treatment responsibility in print and TV population

When discussing individuals, institutions and processes that are described as responsible for preventing cyberbullying incidents, parental guidance and monitoring was commonly mentioned in the literature and the media picked up on that. TV stories tend to speak directly to parents, for instance: “here’s what you can do if your child does [...],” which could be an explanation as to

why parental treatment responsibility is more prevalent here. Over a third (32.5%) of TV population mentions this issue, as opposed to 20% of the print stories. The difference is significant.^{vii}

As far as parents' implementation of monitoring technology (software) on home computers or mobile devices was concerned, more stories in print than the TV ones reported this possibility: 6.8% of print population versus 2.4% of TV transcripts. The difference is significant and could be attributed to the fact that print stories were sometimes driven by the release of research reports on cyberbullying from both government and non-profit institutions. These reports would sometimes mention this issue. This issue is particularly controversial as literature sources point out that monitoring will not eradicate the problem as children successfully circumvent screening.^{viii}

Differences in attribution of treatment responsibility (all based on examples from cyberbullying literature) between the two populations were not significant for the following factors, $p > 0.05$: "teachers as individuals" (8.7% in print and 8.6% in TV); "schools as institutions, including school boards" (21.1% in print and 20% in TV); state legislation (15.8% in print, 18.4% in TV); "websites or technological platforms (social media, phone apps for instance) responsible for removing content or developing cyberbullying policies" (6.4% in print and 4.9% in TV); "websites or technological platforms (social media, phone apps for instance) responsible for removing content or developing cyberbullying policies, *upon requests from parents and schools*" (1.5% print; 2.9% TV).

Differences between the two populations were, however, significant for the attribution of responsibility to federal legislation, where many more TV than print stories discussed this type of responsibility: 15.9% of TV transcripts versus 3.8% of print stories.^{ix}

Issue frames

Parry Aftab, the director of a non-profit organization Wired Safety that deals with cyberbullying and an interviewee in numerous stories in the population emphasized the importance of correcting an erroneous perception of cyberbullying as a “harmless process”- since words allegedly cannot be as damaging as physical force (Wired Safety, 2012). This section of content analysis seeks to elucidate which of the topics discussed in cyberbullying literature appear in the media and are therefore accorded salience through coverage (Entman, 1993). In stark opposition to Aftab’s quote above, content analysis reveals that cyberbullying is most commonly framed as a serious threat that can result in depression and suicide or other maladaptive behavior –43% of total number of stories discusses cyberbullying in this context. This is clear in both print and TV populations. Over a half of the TV transcripts mention cyberbullying in the context of depression and/or suicide, 54.1% in TV and so do 21.5% of print stories, a significant difference, $p < 0.001$.^x

Actually, a minor number of stories in both populations frames cyberbullying as a harmless issue, pointing out that words cannot do harm and sometimes that children need to learn to be tougher, a frame mentioned in 1.1% of print and no TV stories, a total of 0.4% of stories, a difference that is significant as well, $p < 0.05$.^{xi}

Cyberbullying is worse than bullying because of anonymity and wider audience

Another two features of cyberbullying that are often mentioned in literature are that cyberbullying is worse than regular bullying because the victim does not know who the offender is (anonymity); and because of a wider audience that can witness the humiliation, the so called “ubiquity”: for instance, a digital embarrassing photo can go viral, or a Facebook post can be seen by more individuals than any offline incident of bullying. Anonymity is mentioned in 3% of

Framing Cyberbullying in US Mainstream Media

the total number of stories: 3.4% of print and 2.7% of TV stories and the difference is not significant, $p>0.05$. Ubiquity is mentioned in 7.2% of stories in total, 4.9% of print and 8.4% of TV stories, and this difference is barely significant $p=0.046$.

Difficulty assigning treatment responsibility

Another feature of cyberbullying that is often mentioned in literature is the fact that it takes place outside of school jurisdiction, on home computers or cell phones, making it difficult to decide who has the authority to intervene and regulate- parents, schools, police and if there should be guidelines in state and federal law. Total of 4% of stories mention this frame (6% in print and 2.9% in TV, and the difference is barely significant $p<0.05$.^{xii}

Cyberbullying is prevalent among girls

Some studies find that cyberbullying tends to be more prevalent among girls, and this is something that 2.2% of the total number of stories mentioned, 3% of print stories and 1.8% of TV stories, and the difference was not significant, $p>0.1$

Freedom of speech

Punishments for cyberbullying are sometimes defined in terms of their inherent conflict with freedom of speech and 3.1% of the total number of stories mentioned this frame, 0.4% of print and 4.5% of TV stories, and this difference is significant.^{xiii} This study proposed that “freedom of speech” frame would be very resonant within the context of US culture (First Amendment) and therefore exude higher frequency. Yet, judging by the relatively low frequency of this frame, this does not seem to be the case.

Discussion, limitations and future research

The results of the content analysis reveal that media coverage of cyberbullying is centered on prominent and typically tragic incidents. Media coverage does not increase gradually from 2006 to 2013 as the number of reported incidents from statistics in the literature review might lead us to believe; rather, it spikes in response to high profile incidents, which suggests the predominantly episodic nature of the coverage. Based on framing literature, this study confirms the hypothesis that TV coverage would be more episodic than the print coverage, with statistically significant findings: while 22.3% of print stories were triggered by individual cyberbullying incidents, in the TV population this was the case with 59.2% of the stories.

Furthermore, while less than a third of the print population (26%) attributes causal responsibility to individuals involved in cyberbullying incidents, 44.1 % of the TV population does the same. Attribution of causal responsibility to individuals is another characteristic of episodic framing according to Iyengar's framework, and these findings suggest that TV coverage is more episodic when evaluated on this criterion as well.

The third feature of cyberbullying tested in relation to episodic nature of the coverage was the attribution of causal attribution to technology. This hypothesis, however, was not confirmed: when evaluated against this standard, print coverage was more likely to blame technology than TV coverage: 9.1% of print stories and 5.1% of TV stories mention technology in this context, and the difference is significant, $p < 0.05$. Overall, less than 10% of the overall number of stories (6.5%) blames technology for cyberbullying, which is a welcomed finding given the caveats in cyberbullying literature. Research shows that fear of technology can lead parents to rescind access to technology (social networks, cell phones) to their children, which in turn minimizes the

chances that children would report cyberbullying to their parents for the fear of losing their privileges.

The fourth feature of cyberbullying coverage considered to be an indicator of a story's episodic nature was the attribution of treatment responsibility to courts. Every story where such responsibility was related to courts, either revolved around an individual incident that led to a court case; or discussed how an incident should be resolved in court. Such discussion was typically limited to blaming individuals and discussing faults in their behavior, without much analysis of complex factors behind cyberbullying. More TV stories discussed court responsibility: 35.5% of them, in comparison to 20% of print stories, a difference that is significant, $p < 0.001$. By focusing only on the intricacies of court cases and their role in resolving individual cyberbullying incidents, the coverage fails to discuss the value of a policy, which is another characteristic of episodic coverage. Hence, an important implication of these findings is that the public is being deprived of a substantive discussion about cyberbullying remedies, outside of the coverage about, typically dramatic cases, as the framing discussion will show.

While the differences in how frequently the two populations referred to anonymity, family values and social and cultural influences were not tested in relation to episodic nature of the coverage, this study argues that they are relevant nonetheless. Framing literature proposes that the very description of how causes behind a phenomenon are portrayed is a valuable finding as it is indicative of how the public may think about this issue; as well as which institutions and practices it might hold responsible for the prevention of future cyberbullying cases. These results could also point to the direction which the policies at the school, local, state or federal level might take. Only 3.1% of the total number of stories framed parents and family values as causes behind cyberbullying, more in TV (4.1%) than in print (1.1%). Anonymity as a contributing

factor was discussed in 3.9% of stories (1.9% in print and 4.9% in TV). Finally, a discussion of social and cultural factors behind cyberbullying, such as normalizing cyberbullying in popular culture, series and reality shows among others, where bullying and cyberbullying are presented as “a necessary evil” a child might expect to encounter, is missing from the coverage. Merely 3.4% of the stories frame cyberbullying in this manner (4.2% in print and 2.9% in TV).

The research question sought to discover whether there is a difference between print and TV stories in which people and institutions are ascribed responsibility for treating the existing and preventing future cyberbullying cases. The study used individuals and institutions that held treatment responsibility according to cyberbullying literature. Parental guidance and monitoring was a common reference in cyberbullying research that also appeared in the media. Over a third (32.5%) of TV population mentions this issue, as opposed to 20% of the print stories. The difference is significant, $p < 0.001$. Narratives in TV transcripts tend to address parents directly and the focus on this type of responsibility could be a result of attempts to appeal to an audience. As far as parents' implementation of monitoring technology (software) on home computers or mobile devices, more stories in print than the TV ones dealt with this issue: 6.8% of print population versus 2.4% of TV transcripts. The difference is significant, $p < 0.05$, and could be explained by releases of research reports on cyberbullying from both government and non-profit institutions that sometimes mentioned this feature and tended to trigger print stories. This issue is controversial in literature because sources point out that such monitoring is often not effective.

The differences in attribution of treatment responsibility (all based on examples from cyberbullying literature) between the two populations were not significant, $p > 0.05$, for the majority of factors tested in this study. However, the author argues that the importance of knowing the frequency of attribution of treatment responsibility informs researchers'

understanding of public perception of cyberbullying through media effects on the audience. This perception has implications for cyberbullying prevention and intervention policies. Less than 10% of total number of stories found “teachers as individuals” to be responsible for resolving incidents and preventing future ones. More stories attributed this responsibility to schools as institutions, including school boards, (21.1% in print and 20% in TV). As states started to introduce bullying and cyberbullying legislation, media picked up on this process and attributed responsibility to state legislation (15.8% in print, 18.4% in TV). Websites or technological platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, among others, were held responsible for removing content or developing cyberbullying policies in merely 5.4% of overall stories (6.4% in print and 4.9% in TV). While 1.5% of print and 2.9% of TV stories specified that websites or technological platforms are or should be responsible for removing content or developing cyberbullying policies, upon requests from parents and schools. Finally, many more TV than print stories discussed federal legislation as responsible for handling cyberbullying: 15.9% of TV transcripts versus 3.8% of print stories, a difference that was significant, $p < 0.001$.

The analysis of frames shows that, contrary to fears of cyberbullying prevention experts, media does not portray cyberbullying as a harmless issue. Depression or suicide was associated with cyberbullying in 43% of the total number of stories (21.5% in print and 54.1% in TV). Only 0.4% of stories framed cyberbullying as an issue that should not be taken seriously because words can do no harm. Other features of cyberbullying that often appear in literature were not so frequent media frames: 2.2% of overall stories discuss cyberbullying as a phenomenon peculiar to girls, which might be reflective of the fact that research has not reached a consensus on this point. That it is difficult to assign treatment responsibility behind cyberbullying because it happens outside of schools’ jurisdiction is a frame present in 4% of stories. That cyberbullying is

worse than bullying because of anonymity, which emboldens the perpetrator and prevents an empathic reaction that might impede bullying, was discussed in 3% of the overall number of stories. A slightly higher number emphasized that cyberbullying can be worse than regular bullying because many more individuals can witness the humiliation online than in offline environment: 7.2% of overall stories. Finally, despite the prediction based on cultural congruence in framing theory, freedom of speech frame was not frequent in the coverage: 3.1% of overall stories discussed it. The study proposed that censoring cyberbullying might clash with freedom of speech would constitute a frame that would be particularly culturally resonant and congruent for both journalists and audiences in the context of the First Amendment, resulting in frequent discussion of this frame, which was not the case.

The limitations of this study should be acknowledged. Given that this is a content analysis, we can only infer, on the basis of framing literature the possible effects on the public. A subsequent experiment would be suited to test the inferred effects. Furthermore, this study did not discriminate between frames according to their dominance in the stories, and competing frames can have different effects depending on their prominence in the story. Finally, this is an analysis of mainstream media only, and a substantial portion of the discussion now takes place online: on social media, blogs and news media websites. Mainstream media that this study looks into do not have the same agenda setting influence they had in the broadcast era. An analysis of discussion online would provide a more rounded insight into how cyberbullying is framed in the United States, which can be the direction for future research.

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Appendix

Table 1:

Annual distribution of stories

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Print	8	11	48	29	60	58	52
TV	13	56	68	48	128	86	110

ⁱA chi-square test indicated that whether a story was episodic or not varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 95.69, p < 0.001$

ⁱⁱA chi-square test indicated that whether a story attributed causal responsibility to individuals participating in cyberbullying incidents varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 24.211, p < 0.001$ "

ⁱⁱⁱ A chi-square test indicated that whether a story contributed causal responsibility to technology varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 4.528, p = 0.026$ "

^{iv} A chi-square test indicated that whether a story mentioned court responsibility varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 19.853, p < 0.001$

^v A chi-square test indicated that whether a story mentioned anonymity varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 4.261, p = 0.026$ ”

^{vi} A chi-square test indicated that whether a story mentioned family influences varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 5.180, p = 0.015$ ”

^{vii} A chi-square test indicated that whether a story attributed treatment responsibility to parental guidance and monitoring varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 13.546, p < 0.001$.”

^{viii} A chi-square test indicated that whether a story mentioned parental implementation of monitoring technology varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 9.237, p = 0.003$ ”

^{ix} A chi-square test indicated that whether a story mentioned federal legislation as treatment responsibility varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 24.673, p < 0.001$

^x A chi-square test indicated that whether a story contained depression/suicide frame varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 75.667, p < 0.001$.”

^{xi} A chi-square test indicated that whether a story mentioned cyberbullying as an issue without serious consequences varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 5.796, p = 0.040$

^{xii} A chi-square test indicated that whether a story mentioned the difficulty of assigning treatment responsibility behind cyberbullying varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 5.796, p = 0.040$ ”

^{xiii} A chi-square test indicated that whether a story mentioned freedom of speech frame varied on the basis of its type (print or TV), $\chi^2(1, N = 775) = 9.924, p = 0.001$