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# The Portrayal of Bullying Behaviour in Childhood: An Examination of Canadian and American Mass Print Parenting Magazines from 2000 to 2015

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**The Portrayal of Bullying Behaviour in Childhood: An Examination of Canadian and American Mass Print Parenting Magazines from 2000 to 2015**

By

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A Major Research Paper Submitted to the Department of Sociology in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts

Wilfrid Laurier University

2015

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## **Abstract**

As the social construction of bullying remains an important area of research, to date, much of the academic research has treated bullying within a psychological framework. This research project took a different approach towards bullying in childhood. From a sociological perspective, this study examined the portrayals of childhood bullying presented within various mass print parenting magazines. A social constructionist approach guided this media content analysis, while guiding questions were used to assess the data.

Results indicate that childhood bullies, victims, and bystanders are all affected by bullying episodes. It is characterized as a common issue, often occurring on the schoolyard playground, or within the confines of a classroom setting. With greater emphasis placed on intensive parenting, parents are encouraged to remain in constant contact with their child, looking for signs of bullying. This included: lack of appetite, trouble sleeping, anxiety, depression, and reluctance to go to school.

This research project contributes to the current literature available, through examination of various social constructions within the media. It remains an important area of research as childhood bullying is viewed as an increasing social problem.

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# **The Portrayal of Bullying Behaviour in Childhood: An Examination of Canadian and American Mass Print Parenting Magazines from 2000 to 2015**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Before the 1960's, childhood bullying was rarely discussed. It was Scandinavian researcher Olweus who brought this research to the forefront (Borntrager, Davis, Berstein & Gorman 2009). He found that 15 percent of children in Norway claimed to have been affected by bullying, with 7 percent claiming to have been a bully to others (Olweus 1993). Although the act of bullying among peers is not new, the ways in which we respond to it and understand it have changed, through new categories of difference and labelling (Bazelon 2014). Furthermore, once confined to the face-to-face interaction of youth, the problem has expanded with the widened use of internet. Current incidence rates within Canada state that 30 percent of students have experienced cyberbullying within the last two years. An additional 10 percent say they had received threats and intimidation by text message (Knowlton 2015).

The social construction of bullying remains an important area of research. Due to the heightened risk aversion and social understanding of children as more at risk, it is important that we not take current understandings as given and unproblematic. We need to look closely at these socially constructed understandings, and question what their implications are for children and parents. Today, bullying is treated as an important growing, social problem. Statistically speaking, current trends indicate that globally, 77 percent of students are bullied, either physically or verbally, within schools (nobullying.com 2015).

To date, much of the academic research has treated bullying within a psychological framework. This research project took a different approach towards bullying in childhood. From a sociological perspective, the current study examined portrayals of childhood bullying as

presented within various mass print parenting magazines. Methodologically speaking, a social constructionist approach guided this media content analysis. Through discourse analysis, this project aimed to expose the various interpretations of childhood bullying, examining their implications for children labeled as “bully.”

### **Profile on the Current Status of Bullying (Across Canada & USA)**

According to Bazelon (2014), we are amidst a second wave of bullying awareness. To date, 20 percent of students in Ontario schools claim to have been victims of bullying within the last year (Knowlton 2015). In 41 percent of those cases, the bullying had gone on for months (Knowlton 2015). Incidence rates across Canada suggest that 61 percent of face-to-face bullying episodes are conducted by males, whereas 34 percent are female. With cyberbullying on the rise, and high profile cases, including the death of Amanda Todd (Davies, Randall, Abrose & Orand 2015), individuals are becoming much more aware of its prevalence. In terms of bullying and the internet, reports suggest that 68 percent of cyberbullies are female, and 28 percent male (Knowlton 2015).

Across North America, statistics indicate that a mere 7 percent of parents are concerned with the rise of cyberbullying (Pew Research Center). According to Pew Internet Research Center (2014), in the year 2014, 7 out of every 10 children claimed to have been a witness to cyberbullying while using social media. Furthermore, 90 percent of children who have claimed to be a witness to online bullying, expressed concerns over the behaviour, but did not get involved (nobullying.com 2015). When it comes to bullying within schools, across North America 29 percent of students reported being bullied right in the classroom. An additional 12 percent explain how it often occurs on the playground, during recess breaks (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 2014).

## **Central Research Questions**

The main research question that guided this investigation was: How is bullying socially constructed in the media? Basic analytic questions were used to approach the data and include: What is bullying? What causes it? What are its consequences? What can be done about it? This research project aimed to develop a better understanding of how bullying is constructed and understood among popular parenting magazines. In doing so, a series of related questions further guided this research. They include: How is childhood bullying portrayed within Western society through analysis of mass print parenting magazines? Where is blame placed when it comes to incidences of bullying? Where is it said to occur most? What are the described solutions, if any, to bullying in childhood? What is described as the parental role in putting an end to childhood bullying? This project sheds light on the common patterns of actions that are inherent within bullying episodes and social situations. This project contributes to previous research by offering further insight into the specific ways in which bullying is defined, understood, and the inherent implications for society.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to provide an adequate background for the analysis of childhood bullying within mass print parenting magazines, an extensive literature review was completed. The following sections examine and explore previous research on bullying in childhood, various social political impacts, and current understandings of children and their needs.

### **Psychological Definitions and Statistics on Bullying**

It is important to examine current psychological understandings of childhood bullying, as much of the academic research has continued to treat bullying within a psychological framework.



Heinemann (1972) was one of the first individuals to discuss the occurrence of bullying (Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefoghe 2002). He developed a term called “mobbing” to refer to group violence against an individual. Similar to the English word “mobbing,” this refers to the type of deviant behaviour that occurs suddenly and subsides suddenly, based on the attack of one child against another, weaker child (Smith et al., 2002). A similar use of this concept has appeared in German literature. Olweus (2013) characterizes three main facets of bullying behaviour in children, which include: intentionality, repetitiveness, and power imbalance. The act of bullying itself is viewed as a form of aggressive behaviour in which one individual imposes, with intent, discomfort and/or injury towards another individual (Olweus 2013). This form of bullying is characterized as “proactive aggression,” based on “asymmetric power relationships and some repetitiveness” (Olweus 2013, 756). This definition of bullying has been widely accepted as both the conventional and traditional classification of bullying behaviour (Olweus 2013).

Cross-culturally, researchers have identified two main streams of aggressive bullying behaviour, direct and indirect (Borotrager et al., 2009). Direct aggression involves acts that are physically aggressive in nature including, hitting, pushing, and kicking. Direct aggression also consists of acts that are verbally aggressive including, taunting and teasing. Indirect behaviours are acts described as “third party involvement” (Borotrager et al., 2009). These are covert behaviours and include gossip, rumors, and social exclusion. Indirect forms of bullying can be further classified as “relational bullying” or “social aggression,” as the focus is to harm interpersonal, peer relationships (Borotrager et al., 2009).

Eslea et al., (2003) explain how bystanders remain present in approximately 85 percent of bullying episodes. Bullying tends to occur in groups, in which 63 percent of children admitted to

playing a participant role of victim, bully, bully assistant, defender, or reinforcer (Eslea et al., 2003). Bullies are also largely described as being disruptive and more inclined to start fights (Nabuzoka & Smith 1993). When it comes to victims, childhood peers described the typical victim as someone who is shy and reserved by nature. The three main risk factors associated with increased victimization include, having few friends, being rejected by peer groups, and having friends who are unable to help or protect you (Hodges, Malone & Perry 1997).

A considerable amount of research has focused on school aged bullying, whether it be in the classroom or on the playground. In this research there seems to be a strong connection between social power and bullying, as often times the concepts of being a “bully” and being considered “popular” by peers are conflated (Duncan & Owens 2011). The common definition of bullying characterizes the behaviour as involving the intent to do harm onto others. The bully is then understood as someone who does not accept and/or understand the common moral order of society (Davies 2011). In this sense, we can understand childhood bullies as ordinary children who simply engage in acts of bullying amidst particular group situations (Heinemann 1972). It is further argued that bullying has the capacity to affect not only the person being bullied, but the bystanders, families, and schools within the wider community in which it occurs (Sullivan, Cleary & Sullivan 2004).

It distinguishing between the bully and the victim, European researchers have characterized three basic forms of victimization: verbal, physical, and indirect (Bjorkqvist 1994). It is suggested that peer victimization contributes to the development of psychosocial maladjustment. For children, threats to social bonds may result in loneliness, anxiety (Baumeister & Leary 1995), withdrawal, and submission (Parkhurst & Asher 1992). These peer relationship difficulties directly relate to peer victimization in childhood (Boulton & Smith

1994). Research has indicated that peer victimization can occur in many contexts, both on and off school grounds (Raskauskas 2010), when adult supervisors are not present (Whitney & Smith 1993). It is argued that school staff need to look for signs of victimization in children. This includes signs of depression, and/or low self-esteem (Raskauskas 2010). Raskauskas (2010) highlights the importance of empowering bystanders to intervene. This continues to remain one of the most effective ways to stop incidences of bullying because it deprives the bully of his/her “supportive” audience.

### **Social Constructions of Childhood**

In examining how children are portrayed within the media, it is important to understand the common social constructions of childhood that are reflected throughout current literature.

#### **Children as Inherently Bad**

The social constructions of childhood often portray children in a negative light. When adults witness negative behaviours in childhood, they place blame on the larger systemic failures of society. This includes: sexism, racism, poverty, and extreme consumerism (Rosier 2009). Ayers (1997) provides an eloquent quotation by describing the “schizophrenic view” of childhood, reflecting on the problematic nature of our understanding:

*Our culture embraces a schizophrenic view of children: we romance childhood as a time of innocence and beauty, and we simultaneously construct an image of original sin and elemental evil lurking in those bodies. Children are angels and devils- pure and wicked, clean and corrupt, lambs and devils. When children are left to themselves, however, our culture assumes the demon child has the upper hand... Young people today find themselves in a peculiarly precarious landscape- reified as consumers, demonized as a*

*threat, they inhabit a cultural fault-line that is bumpy for all and fatal for some. (Ayers 1997:98).*

For adults, children are often viewed as a disruption and inconvenience to adult life (Rosier 2009). However, adults also display various emotions of anxiety and worry over the vulnerability of children. The protection of children, through child safety, remains a constant concern. For adults, they often show resentment towards children who are irresponsible and reckless.

### Children as Disruptive to Adult Life

Children are regarded as “novice members of society” (Rosier 2009), as they pose challenges to the proper etiquette of adult life. According to Cahill (1987), children must be initiated into proper adulthood by both learning and performing basic interactional rituals between members of society. Children will often violate the code of proper public behaviour, by engaging in acts of “playful terrorism” (Cahill 1987). Children are socially constructed as inferior to adults. The subordinate status of children is typically communicated throughout society, reflective of their “nuisance” character (Rosier 2009). Examples include kids-free advertising, such as kid-free restaurants or kid-free public centres (Cahill 1987). This treatment is directed towards children and youth. This pervasive tolerance for the discrimination against children throughout society demonstrates the common view of children as the inferior and disruptive “other” (Rosier 2009).

### Children as Vulnerable

There is a common notion throughout society that children are naïve individuals, making them highly vulnerable to the dangerous aspects of social life. Middle-class parenting styles

exacerbate the need for increased supervision and nurturing (VanAusdale & Feagin 2001). The independence of children has declined, resulting in the “infantilization of middle-class childhood” (Rosier 2009). Within the media, it is common practise to relay the details of child kidnappings, fostering the perception that these issues are commonplace. These common constructions of childhood severely impact the child’s sense of freedom. This trend has resulted in an irrational fear that children will fall victim to these heinous, but rare, crimes.

### Children as Medical Subjects

The family unit has become a space for socialization as individuals adhere to dominant medical regimes. This is a means of maintaining the health and well-being of society at large. Peterson (2003) explains that with increased emphasis on the idea of “risk society,” one continues to adopt various preventative health measures through a discourse of health promotion. Individuals have developed self-care techniques by adhering to strict codes of conduct for behaviour. One begins to adopt various lifestyle changes that are shaped by economic, social, and political factors (Peterson 2003). In relation to biosocieties, the individual subjects themselves to the ideas of health promotion as presented in society. No longer passive recipients, we become actively engaged in the health information presented to us. With less freedom of choice, individuals begin to anticipate and prevent the overall emergence of illness, deviant behaviour, and abnormality in childhood (Peterson 2003). We become what Rose (2006) refers to as the “biological citizen.” The way we understand bullying is linked to the medicalization of the family unit, as they are both social circumstances that reinforce one another.

Children are viewed as potentially pathological subjects. This is reflective of a larger public discourse in which one’s general health is subject to authoritarian controls and interventions, based on medicalization (Pickett 2005). These discourses depict dominant themes

of health education. Parents turn to the medicalization of childhood dysfunction in accordance to neoliberal ideologies that structure society.

### **Paranoid Parenting Practises**

With increased emphasis on the roles of intensive parenting, parents begin to adopt what Furedi (2002) refers to as, “paranoid parenting practises.” These notions of parenting practise are commonly reflected throughout much of the academic research.

Furedi (2002) explains why ignoring the experts, when it comes to childrearing, may be the best option for your child. In a world marked by fear and anxiety, today’s parenting style is based on child protection. Guided by “expert” opinion, parents are strongly advised to protect and supervise their children, not only outdoors but also within the confines of the home. When children watch television, parents are expected to supervise, a type of parenting practise referred to as “co-viewing” (Furedi 2002). The parent acts as a media educator, remaining in constant contact with the child. Previous research has argued that increased parental supervision prevents the exposure of danger. It is believed that the time spent with parents and guardians prevents children from engaging in inappropriate activity. A majority of the literature on proper parenting practise further explains how it is a parental duty to ensure that the child is under constant supervision, even when a parental figure is absent (Furedi 2002). This may mean finding a babysitter or adult supervisor who can fill the role of parent during your absence.

The prominent view that children are unable to survive without the continued presence of a responsible adult is a common ideology throughout society. Public campaigns aim to frighten parents into what is regarded as “proper parenting procedure” (Furedi 2002). Both safety and caution remain intrinsic virtues. These fears are further driven by the anticipation and belief that

children are in constant danger. The stifling effect of these practises relate to the common notion of risk society, however, instead of managing risks, it is avoided all together. Parents today are faced with the pressure of adopting a multitude of precautionary approaches. This has resulted in a breakdown of adult solidarity (Furedi 2002). The socialization of children depends on a network of adults. Parents cannot act as the sole supervisor of childhood mismanagement. Often, it was the community as a whole that felt a sense of responsibility to reprimand children who misbehaved in public spaces. Nowadays, mothers and fathers are expected to handle their own children, without the interference of other adults (Furedi 2002). This breakdown in community solidarity has created a sense of parental paranoia, further perpetuating a sense of mistrust within the parenting community.

### **Parenting Advice and the Media**

As the 1980's marked the beginning of a decade in which the mothers of children began entering the workforce in Canada, deeply embedded within cultural values and norms is the common notion that women are best suited towards childcare and the general duties of motherhood (Wall 2013). Wall (2013) explains how culturally, the way we understand both childhood and motherhood have important implications for childcare policy and practise. In turn, popular culture reinforces these depictions of what is considered "proper" child-rearing practise, as the needs of children stem from professional and institutional practises (Wall 2009). As a result, individuals tend to engage in what is regarded as "intensive parenting."

A lot of childrearing advice emphasizes the overall importance of both recognizing and maintaining the child's cognitive and psychological well-being (Wall 2009). Hays (1996) explains how the perceived "good mother" is to keep in constant contact with the child by promoting their psychological health. If the child deviates from what is considered "normal

behaviour,” then the mother often feels that it is necessary to determine a specific reason for the deviant conduct. This is regarded as a prominent code of proper mothering practise (Hays 1996).

These representations of childhood demonstrate how societal discourses implicate parental advice literature aimed at childrearing. In exacerbating concepts of “disorder” and “deviance,” these mass media representations show how the adoption of various preventative health measures result in rather strict codes of conduct for one’s behaviour (Peterson 2003). As several magazines emphasize the importance of what is considered “good parenting practise,” these ideologies directly reflect the roles of modern parenthood. With a significant increase in intensive mothering practises, these forms of mass media ensure that parents, and mothers in particular, continue to promote the psychological health and well-being of the child (Wall 2009).

As noted by Hoffman (2009), childcare advice literature remains a multi-billion-dollar industry that is said to be guided by experts in the field. It is estimated that over 1500 books and 200 magazine titles on parenting advice remain in circulation. This is said to represent, in approximation, 20% of the “popular psychology market” (Hoffman 2009). For Hoffman (2009), the main and concerning issue is the fact that while parenting advice literature is said to be based on ‘expert’ opinion, the term ‘expert’ itself is ambiguous, as various ideals govern these constructs of childhood development. Practises surrounding child rearing can be problematic in terms of the way they are conceptualized and understood. Greater forces, including institutional and national constructs, influence the understanding of the child, parent, and what is regarded as good parenting practise (Hoffman 2009).

These common ideologies and social constructions exemplify the type of advice given to parents when dealing with typical child development. Clarke, Mosleh and Janketic (2014) further explain how various media representations of childhood emphasise the overall importance in



raising a “normal” child. In turn, parents are encouraged to begin training the child in infancy through the use of science, psychiatric practise and expert medicine. Medical and scientific experts, along with cultural, political, economic and social forces tend to dominate media portrayal. In fact, negative media portrayal has the potential to severely impact various constructions of childhood (Sieff 2003).

Media has the potential to affect the way children are thought of and understood in society. Caring for children is of utmost importance and a majority of mothers learn “appropriate” home health care from a variety of sources, including magazines and books (Clarke et al., 2014). Within the popular women’s magazine *Chatelaine*, numerous articles continued to emphasize the importance of scientific experts and how mothers could increasingly improve their child’s well-being, and society in general, if they pay particular attention to the results of these experts (Clarke et al., 2014). Several childrearing discourses emphasize the importance of professionalized parenting through psychological based practises (Hoffman 2009). Parents are continually encouraged to play the role of “therapist” when it comes to emotional mismanagement of behaviour. Negative emotions are often portrayed as a threat to not only personal functioning, but family and societal functioning as well. Current trends in parental advice literature pose a cause for caution (Hoffman 2009). Through a process of “media saturation,” individuals continue to develop, resist, and reinforce various ideas (Clarke 2010).

### **Changing Understandings of Children’s Needs**

Through an integration of institutional, ideological, and psychological approaches to childhood, individuals become much more in-tune with a child’s overall development. Wall (2009) describes how twentieth century understandings of childhood are largely affected by the field of developmental psychology. Consequently, if a child deviates from that which is

considered “normal” behaviour, it is common practise to determine a specific reason or explanation for the deviant behaviour. Hays (1996) explains how this is a prominent mode of practise. Family, school, and extra-curricular activities play a key role in childhood development. This reaffirms society’s increased focus on childhood brain development and cognitive ability (Wall 2013).

### The Cultural Shift in Understanding

There has been a cultural shift in our current understandings of children and their needs. Within the public sphere, children lack a sense of personal autonomy (Caputo 2007). In the 1980’s, children were largely portrayed as being both independent and resilient in nature. More recently, this conceptualization of children has shifted, with an increased focus on intensive parenting (Wall 2013). In previous eras of childhood, there was a distinct understanding that it was of benefit for children to maintain a certain level of social interaction with other children. This provided the opportunity for children to become much more responsible and self-sufficient (Berstein 1984). Wall (2013) further explains how children are conceptualized as requiring more supervision and direction. The 2000’s marked an era in which the needs of the child took precedence over the needs of the mother and/or the couple (Wall 2013). There is an increasing amount of pressure for middle-class families to direct and guide their children’s learning, as opposed to letting the child take responsibility for their actions and interactions (Caputo 2007).

### **Context of Parenting**

#### Neoliberalism

The growth of intensive mothering occurred alongside the rise of neoliberalism (Wall 2013). This resulted in the increasing focus on risk in society. Under the guise of neoliberalism, children are best understood in terms of their overall investment opportunity. Having the

potential to become either a good citizen or future risk to society, children are viewed as a social investment opportunity (Wall 2013). Wall (2013) explains how the result of neoliberalism is a “cultural preoccupation” with individual control and risk management. This effects the social constructions of children’s need and the various roles and responsibilities of motherhood. Within the individualistic climate of neoliberalism, the focus of life itself is in managing risks and making informed decisions based on expert guided opinions (Beck-Gernsheim 1996). Middle class parenting practises then involve protecting children from risk, and in turn maximizing individual child potential.

Risk society causes parents, in particular mothers, to feel an increased control over their child’s sense of well-being (Lee, Macvarish & Bristow 2010). Positive outcomes are said to be the result of proper management (Scamell & Alaszewski 2012). Neoliberalism focuses primarily on risk, individual responsibility, and social investment, resulting in the overall responsibilitization of the mother (Wall 2013).

### Intensive Mothering

Throughout history, mothers have been regarded as the primary nurturer and caregiver of children (Yok-Fong 2010). Although women have continued to enter the workforce, Bianchi (2000) explains how children today are spending even more time with their mothers than before. This is due to the fact that employed mothers are spending more “quality time” (Booth et al., 2002) with their children, compensating for time spent apart.

Contemporary parenting literature emphasizes the need for “intensive mothering.” Hays (1996) characterizes this as “child-centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive, and financially expensive” (122). Mothers are expected to devote a substantial amount

of time and resources to their children. The child's well-being is contingent upon both the quantity and quality of mother-child relations (Yok-Fong 2010). The time spent between child and mother increases parent-child bonding (Dinero et al., 2008). This sense of security extends into adulthood, deterring the child from behavioural problems. Children who maintain a close bond with their mothers may be more apt to comply with the conventional rules and norms that govern society (Yok-Fung 2010).

There is also an increasing pressure for middle class mothers to engage in, what Lareau (2002) refers to as, "concerted cultivation." Parents are devoting time and energy into extra-curricular activities with their child, including reading and playing, fostering intellectual and academic skills (Hofferth & Sandberg 2001). It is argued that time spent together decreases parent-child conflict, promoting structured environments that change children's trajectories away from deviant behaviours of crime or delinquency (Yok-Fung 2010).

### **Bullying and Schools**

The purpose of this section is to specifically examine bullying in schools, as a majority of the academic literature explain how bullying tends to occur within schools, on the playground, or inside the classroom setting.

Williams et al., (1996) explain how both the victim and bully is associated with an increased risk of physical and/or mental problems in childhood. This can include stomach ache, headache, bedwetting, and depression (Williams et al., 1996). In addition, previous research has indicated that bullies and victims display certain characteristics that distinguish them from children who are not regularly involved in bullying episodes. Bullies are found to be much more violent, delinquent, aggressive, and popular. Victims typically display lower self-esteem, are less assertive, and far more anxious (Junger-Tas & VanKesteren 1999). Researchers argue that it is

important for school staff, parents, and students to be involved in efforts to eradicate bullying behaviour in schools. This includes public awareness campaigns based on anti-bullying strategies. The recommendation for parents is to stay informed about anti-bullying policies, and report any incidences that do occur (Fekkes, Pijpers, Verloove-Vanhorick 2005).

There is also a cause for concern when examining previous sociological research on bullying. Bansel et al., (2009) explain how typical responses that result in the pathologization of wrongdoers may lock them into these negative identities (Hargreaves 1976). Within the educational system, current policies give teachers full responsibility in identifying acts of bullying and proper remediation practises. Remediation often focuses on the development of proper social skills including, empathy, conscious, and moral awareness (Bansel et al., 2009). School communities are largely based on unofficial pedagogical practises of category membership. In turn, this fosters the development of social groupings based on inclusion and exclusion. Students who are caught in acts of bullying that lie outside the range of what can be accepted, such as violence, often face exclusion. This can lead to the individual pathologizing of bullying behaviour, which according to Bansel et al., (2009) remains part of the problem. The correlation between school factors and the prevalence of bullying have been largely under investigated (Farrington 1993).

Goffman's (1968) concept of "total institution" is particularly relevant in understanding certain aspects of the school. Similar to prisons, military establishments, and asylums, they are a social institution based on authoritarian relationships. There remains a clear division of appropriate behaviour and socially defined roles. These bureaucratic organizations are further supported by rituals of punishment and discipline. As an educational institution, the goal is to educate and socialize youth. With a low tolerance for individual differences, conformity

continues to remain the intrinsic component of school life (Beynon 1985). Based on power-dominant relationships, educational institutions work to create socially desirable humans (Bansel et al., 2003).

### The Culture of Bullying

The culture of bullying is complex, interwoven into the norms and values of an authoritarian culture (MacDonald & Swart 2004). School culture is based on a set of fundamental norms and values, reflected in the way that children behave (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana 2002). The curriculum conveys the main purpose of these systems and has the power to influence individual child behaviour (Donald et al., 2002). It is argued that in order to combat the culture of bullying, educational institutions need to induce positive culture by ensuring student safety. Often, reports of bullying go unreported. According to MacDonald and Swart (2004), the culture of bullying is based on secrecy, fear, and a general lack of awareness. Children feel a sense of apprehension when faced with episodes of bullying. A common perception among students is that schools actually tolerate bullying, because often nothing gets done about it. Ultimately, acts of bullying continue to promote a culture of disrespect, which is further perpetuated by the school through lack of awareness. In this sense, school culture simulates bullying culture. Schools are based on an authoritarian culture that inadvertently prescribes roles, values, and expectations designed to regulate behaviour (MacDonald & Swart 2004). Students continue to weigh their values relative to those of others (Duncan 1999).

It is important to understand the culture of bullying with respect to the “bully.” Previous research has indicated that socially, bullies are regarded as “deviant” but popular (Thornberg 2011). It is suggested that social norms are produced among students, which includes acts of exclusion, non-conformity, and isolation (Cranham & Carroll 2003). Ethnographic research has

linked bullying to a general intolerance of diversity among peer cultures (Cadigan 2002). Purportedly, students often signal disapproval of peer behaviours that clash with the accepted social mores and rules of the group (Besag 2006). With regards to the victims of bullying, peer cultures tended to stigmatize these individuals with negative labels, making it nearly impossible for them to change their status or improve their situations (Evans & Eder 1993). This coincides with stigma theory (Goffman 1963) and labelling theory (Becker 1963). Bullies struggle for power, popularity, and friends, as individual social positioning is based upon status hierarchy (Thornberg 2011).

### Bullying Among Students

Both the influence and power of groups is a significant component of human development. Childhood groups are a fundamental microsocial structure in the child's ecological system (Rodkin 2004). Peer group dynamics have a significant influence on childhood development during primary school years (Stauffacher & DeHart 2006). Bullying among students has the ability to create a variety of emotional, social, and behavioural attributes (Rodkin 2004). Children observe and implicate their own behaviour and that of their peers' during various social interactions. This contributes to the development of self (Charon 2001). Bullying among students is a complex behaviour as the entire process is based on the individual roles played by each member of the group (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Previous research has indicated that some students bullying others, or approve of bullying behaviour, in order to enhance their own status. This reinforces their social position of power amongst the peer group (Gini 2006).

According to Social Identity Theory (Gini 2006), an individuals' attitudes, behaviours and self- perceptions toward "in-group" and "out-group" members stem from a desire to be

associated with the “in-group.” In contrast, “out-group” members are more apt to experience discrimination. School bullying among students acts as a creator of pupil peer pressure (Hamarus & Kaikkonen 2008).

### Children’s Voices

In examination of bullying from the students’ perspective, Buchanan and Winzer (2000) performed ethnographic interviews among several children within the Red Deer School District of Alberta. An overwhelming majority of the children interviewed viewed school bullying as a problem. They explained how teachers need to be much more vigilant and willing to intervene. When asked “who bullies?” children offered very similar descriptions. Bullies were described as individuals who are mean towards others, often pushing people around, and picking on the smaller children through teasing or name calling. (Buchanan & Winzer 2000). When asked “who is bullied?” the children offered many opinions on the types of individuals prone to bullying. The most common response was that children who are different in some way get bullied. This could include having “weird clothes,” being “quiet’, or those who “aren’t good at sports or math or something” (Buchanan & Winzer 2000). When it comes to gender, 86 percent of the children interviewed claimed that boys were more likely to bully because they are “mostly rough, they are stronger, tougher....” (Buchanan & Winzer 2000). The children further explained how bullying between genders differed. It was suggested that when girls bully each other, they “just bug you all the time and call you names” (Buchanan and Winzer 2000). Boys were described as the ones who will “beat you up.” (Buchanan and Winzer 2000). When asked “where bullying occurs,” a majority of children explained how bullying episodes would often take place within school washrooms, on the playground, or right in the classroom. The children also expressed their frustration with the way bullying is treated by teachers. They expressed concerns for a lack of



teacher involvement, arguing that some teachers do not even notice the amount of bullying that goes on (Buchanan 2000).

### **Zero Tolerance: Current Policies on Race and Class Issues within Educational Systems**

As the majority of academic research focuses on bullying within the classroom, educational institutions have continued to implement zero tolerance policies with regards to race and class issues when it comes to incidences of bullying.

Historically, the development of public education systems corresponded with a shift in the economic and social culture of North America (Katz 1980). Public schools were specifically created in order to mediate social transformations of the country, while contributing to the emergence of an industrial capitalistic society (Katz 1980). Motivated by a fear of delinquency among youth, government officials and educators established a public school system that they felt could alleviate social problems (Casella 2003). Referred to as Zero Tolerance Policies, rules emerged within the educational system, stemming from the 1986 Comprehensive Drug Reform Act, and the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act (Casella 2003).

According to The Advancement Project and Civil Rights Project (2000), there remains very little evidence that Zero Tolerance Policies actually work to reduce violence or increase safety within schools. These educational institutions implement a wide range of practices in order to properly manage children, and create a safer school environment (Waldron 2005). Children and staff play a significant role in working to maintain safer schools. These disciplinary rules can be further classified into three basic categories: rules governing what a student can and cannot do; where a student should be; and what they can or cannot say (Waldron 2005).

The main result of a Zero Tolerance Policy School is differential treatment (Waldron 2005). Accordingly, these institutions are based on social hierarchies connected to ones' race

and/or social class. Waldron (2005) explains how the social status of a student comes into play when determining appropriate punishment. Other times, individual issues or problems were kept quiet in order to maintain a certain reputation within the school system. Several students within Waldron's (2005) study expressed their concerns with the system. Many pupils were largely aware of the inconsistencies and differential treatment among students when it came to school rules and punishment. In turn, several students expressed concern over rules becoming "lax" (Waldron 2005). Students tended to stop following rules altogether if they felt they were no longer being strictly enforced.

Waldron (2005) suggests that due to structural inconsistencies with the system, students feel obliged to challenge rules because they feel as if it is an infringement on their personal rights. Even teachers and administrators admitted to the inconsistencies within the system when it came to punishment, because some parents were "more involved in the school, and sometimes more difficult to deal with" (Waldron 2005: 99). This is largely related to issues of social status, social class, and race within educational systems. In terms of policy implications, having defined consequences for various behaviours that disrupt the school system are important.

Children are currently conceived as at-risk and vulnerable, but also risky and dangerous. Guldberg (2009) explains how children are treated as "nasty brutes" or "helpless victims," and that both of these constructions result in negative consequences for children and society. Sociologically, which children get defined as risky and which children get defined as at-risk tends to vary by social privilege based on race and/or class, which is further reinforced and perpetuated by the Zero Tolerance Policies of many schools within Canada and the United States.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A media content analysis was best suited for this study as the media is known to influence and be affected by social policy and practise. Our personal attitudes and understanding of bullying behaviour in childhood can be further reinforced by various social constructions and ideological assumptions. The role of media is a central contributing factor when it comes to general policy change (Shanahan, McBeth, Hathaway & Arnell 2008). The primary nature of media is for the circulation of information, facts, and portrayal of events and/or situations. This study enabled the examination of bullying behaviour within a larger cultural and social framework.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In exploring how bullying behaviour is socially defined and understood, this research adopted the theoretical framework of social constructivism. According to Creswell (2013), this approach acknowledges various experiences, resulting in diverse ways of interpreting an issue. The focus then, is on the ontological belief of multiple realities constructed through our everyday experiences (Creswell 2013).

Social constructivism allows for variation in our understanding and interpretation of a text. Subsequently, this approach was utilized for the current study as this research examined the social constructions of bullying behaviour within highly circulating parenting magazines. This research focused on the ontological belief of multiple realities constructed through our everyday experiences. These realities were explored through the use of qualitative data. Epistemologically, the notion is that knowledge is subjective in nature, and reliant on context. In adoption of an epistemological belief based on how reality is known, a co-constructed view is adopted. In this sense, reality is achieved through both the researchers experience and that which is being

researched (Creswell 2013). Subsequently, a social constructionist approach was best suited for this study in order to fully appreciate the various interpretations offered within the magazines. It also allowed for the examination of newer perspectives, while contributing to previous research.

### **Sample**

The initial sample collected for analysis contained 158 articles on bullying. The articles were further stratified based on overall relevancy of material. After a preliminary examination of each article, the original sample was then narrowed down to 112 articles total. The eliminated articles did not focus on childhood bullying, some concentrated on bullying within the workplace or adult bullying among peers. These articles were not suitable for analysis as they did not relate to the current study.

The magazines selected for analysis offer advice on anything from childhood growth and development, to issues at home or school. These magazines are parenting based, and are directed towards middle class, working families. Certain magazines were eliminated entirely because the material on bullying was not relevant to childhood bullying. The 5 magazines chose for analysis, *Parents Canada*, *Canadian Family*, *Today's Parent (Canada)*, *Parenting USA*, and *Today's Parent (USA)*, were specifically chosen because they are the highest circulating parenting magazines in Canada and the USA (see table 1 below).

This study is based on all available, full text magazine articles, with graphics, indexed in The Readers Guide to Periodical Literature on the topic of bullying in the selected parenting magazines. The years 2000 to 2015 were selected in order to provide an ample amount of data to adequately document the portrayal of bullying behaviour in childhood.

**Table 1: Magazine Demographics**

<b>Magazine</b>	<b>Readership Class</b>	<b>Average Readership</b>	<b>Average Gender of Readership</b>
<i>Parents Canada</i>	Middle, Working Class	120, 000 Readers	Female, between the ages of 25 to 54
<i>Canadian Family</i>	Middle, Working Class	1,520,000 Readers	Female, between the ages of 25 to 49
<i>Today's Parent Canada</i>	Middle, Working Class	1.6 million Readers	75% Female
<i>Parenting USA</i>	Middle, Working Class	2,230,000 Readers	Not Available
<i>Today's Parent USA</i>	Middle, Working Class	3,240,000 Readers	Female

Source: Online Media Kit 2015

### **Data Collection**

In order to achieve a detailed data set, the Readers Guide to Periodical Literature was used. Each Canadian and American parenting magazine was indexed for articles on bullying. Key words and search terms, such as bullying, victim, and childhood, were used to yield results. After indexing the magazines, a total count of all the articles on bullying from each individual magazine was performed. The top 5 most popular, parenting magazines were then selected for the current study.

Attaining hard copies of each magazine article required going to the individual magazine websites. The articles were easily accessible and already available from the archives section of each website. Overall, the goal was to attain a detailed collection of magazine articles on childhood bullying, from the most popular parenting magazines.

### **Analysis Procedure**

During the analysis procedure, each magazine article was read and reread numerous times over the duration of several weeks. The intent was to summarize each article or story by identifying the main argument. After initial assessment, examples of sentences and phrases that best illustrated the discourse observed were selected. Direct quotes were carefully selected and representative of repeated ideas.

Achieving credibility remains an important component of the analysis process. In order to enhance both the quality and credibility of qualitative research, this project was exposed to rigorous analyzing procedures (Patton 1999). This includes, attention to validity, reliability, and competence of the researcher. This research project was exposed to inductive analysis as repeated themes and ideas were assessed. This research examined prominent content words laden within each magazine article. The current study paid particular attention to detail through examination of context, and the specific language used within a sociolinguistic framework (Salkie 2006). This required rigorous analysis.

Thematic analysis further guided this research project. This allowed for the development of various patterns and themes during data coding. The initial coding process fostered the generation of new ideas and connections between articles (Charmaz 2000). This permitted the development of emerging relationships between the data and previous research.

The overall structure of this research methodology has been inspired by Clarke's (2011) research project on the portrayal of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD) within magazines. As this is an exploratory study, the entire data analysis procedure is subjective and was completed by the writer of this research project.

### **Ethics**

Ethics approval was not required as this study did not involve the use of human participation. The data used was easily accessible and already available for public use.

### **Limitations**

Certain limitations did exist within the context of this study. These were primarily due to time constraints. As this is an exploratory study, other researchers situated differently might notice different themes or frames emergent in the data. Another key limitation is the fact that the focus of this study was on one genre of magazine, directed towards specific audiences. The data collected is only reflective of highly circulating parenting magazines. It may be of benefit to examine other prominent magazines in future research.

The limitations outlined above did not pose a threat to the credibility of this research. The intent of this study is to contribute to current understandings of bullying behaviour, highlighting some of the implications for both children and parents.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Preliminary Findings**

A total of 112 articles on childhood bullying were examined. Of the 5 magazines examined, *Parenting USA* had the most articles on childhood bullying, with 36 articles total. *Canadian Family* had the fewest articles on childhood bullying, with only 6 total. All magazines, except for *Today's Parent (USA)*, tended to accompany their articles with some sort of graphic,

whether it be a photo or sketch. In terms of gender representation, 35 articles featured young girls in their graphics, portrayed as either the victim or bully, and 22 articles featured young boys, portrayed as either the victim or bully. Only 2 articles represented both genders together in their graphics. Few articles also included parental figures. One article featured a father and son, and 2 articles featured a mother and daughter in the graphics. One article featured 2 mothers talking on a park bench, without children, in the graphics.

In total, 78 articles were provided by editors, some of whom wrote from personal bullying experiences involving their own children. The remaining articles were provided by a variety of sources, including: 6 individuals with a PhD in the area of child development, 7 bully prevention and advocacy groups, 12 book authors, 3 psycho-therapists, 1 individual with a Masters in Social Work, and 6 mothers who wrote-in from personal experience. The articles from *Today's Parent (USA)* had the most variety, as this magazine was the only one to include articles from psycho-therapists and a Masters Candidate.

### **Key Findings**

Canadian and American parenting magazines were examined and reported collectively in the results section, as there was no significant variation between the Canadian and American content on childhood bullying.

#### What is it?

Childhood bullying was characterized as a natural part of child development, often occurring on the schoolyard playground, or within the confines of a classroom setting. It is described as an issue occurring right at home, on family computers, and cell phones. Both traditional and cyberbullying are defined as the use of fear and/or intimidation in order to gain both power and control. Across magazines, this definition of bullying was consistent, being



described as both an intentional and repeated event, in which a child displays aggression towards another individual. This definition of childhood bullying aligns with the current literature available. As previous research has identified two main streams of bullying behaviour, direct and indirect (Borntrager et al., 2009), it has been further explained that boys tend to engage in direct aggression, whereas girls tend to engage in more indirect forms of aggression. The magazines portrayed direct forms of aggression as acts of hitting, or maliciously teasing, which were often associated with boys. Indirect forms were commonly characterized as threatening, embarrassing, or harassing another individual, often taking place over social media. This form of bullying was commonly associated with girls. The common definition of bullying aligns with Olweus (2013), as the main focus is on power imbalance and control.

There was some inconsistency in terms of how childhood bullying is understood. It was viewed as either a natural process of child development, or a diagnosable behavioural issue in need of correction. Children were viewed as liabilities to society, putting them at an increased risk of being bullied or becoming a bully. It is understood as an inappropriate behaviour, in need of correction, in order for children to become adequate members of society. It is a form of individual child functioning that needs to be dealt with through intervention from parents and educators.

### *Traditional Bullying*

Traditional forms of bullying are described as “*the use of fear and intimidation to gain power and control,*” (“Steps on how to take charge if your child is being bullied,” *Parent’s Canada*) or “*the intent... to create a social web of control and intimidation*” (“Steps on how to take charge if your is being bullied,” *Parent’s Canada*). It is considered a natural “reflex” that we all have. For girls, it commonly includes being bossy and controlling.

Childhood bullying is said to take on many forms, including *“hitting, threatening, intimidating, maliciously teasing and taunting, name calling, making sexual remarks, stealing or damaging personal belongings”* (“Stand up to bullying,” *Today’s Parent USA*). The typical bully was described as dominating, controlling, and manipulating. Statistically speaking, it is further argued that every seven seconds, a child is bullied in some form. It is estimated that 77 percent of students will experience the effects of bullying, either mental or physical, during their school years, which can lead to depression and/or loneliness (“Stand up to bullying,” *Today’s Parent USA*).

### *Cyberbullying*

According to *Today’s Parent (USA)*, cyberbullying is defined as

*“...any digital communication, typically from one minor to another minor, with the purpose of frightening, threatening, embarrassing, or harassing a person. The most common form of cyberbullying is sharing a private message, e-mail, or instant message (IM) with someone else or through a public posting. Cyberbullies’ tools are computers and smartphones and they plague victims via text message, e-mail, IM, chat rooms, social media and blogs”* (Article: Strategies to help parents recognize and prevent cyberbullying).

Cyberbullying is described as a rampant issue that has snowballed rapidly among various social networking sites. According to *Today’s Parent USA* article “5 Reasons children may not ask for help when being bullied”, 42 percent of children have been bullied online, with 35 percent receiving personal threats. An additional survey indicated that 76 percent of students, aged 14 to 24, classified digital abuse as a serious and ongoing problem for their age (“How can I protect my child from cyberbullying?” *Today’s Parent USA*). With children continuing to

spend an increasing amount of time online, cyberbullying is portrayed as a serious parental concern.

Featured articles also discussed cyberbullying as an epidemic, and explain how to protect your child in an online world. Again, these articles highlighted the parental role in monitoring internet usage by setting limits. Warm parenting practises, including, *“having a warm and loving relationship with the child,”* is said to be one of the best ways to protect your child from cyberbullying (*“Dear teacher: how can I protect my teen from cyberbullying?” Canadian Family*). It is defined as *“the deliberate sending of hostile messages by email, cell phone text message, instant messaging (IM), on personal websites and on sites such as MySpace and Facebook that are intended to harm an individual,”* (*“Protect your child from cyber-bullying,” Canadian Family*). Signs of cyberbullying include: long hours on the computer, lack of interest in social situations, visits to the school nurse, falling behind at school, and changes in behaviour including headaches and trouble sleeping.

This new era, referred to as the “digital age”, discusses the seriousness of online safety and the parental role of both recognizing and dealing with cyberbullying. Tips for parents remained fairly similar to the articles on traditional bullying. They included: getting the whole story, setting rules, and staying up to date on your child’s interactions. There is also significant gender stratification when describing bullying. It is argued that in an online world, boy’s threats tend to be physical, whereas girl’s threats are based more on social exclusion. A statistic included from Statistics Canada states that *“Canadian girls are more often involved in cyberbullying incidents than boys (86 percent compared to 55 percent)”* (*“Bullying: the online predator affecting our youth,” Parent’s Canada*).

Common signs of bullying listed included: shift in habits, changes in phone or internet usage, isolation, personality change, and aggressive behaviour. The typical bully is described as someone who is insecure, resorting to intimidation as a means of control. It is suggested that boys bully for power, whereas girls bully for affiliation and affirmation. One article criminalized bullying behaviour in childhood, arguing that sixty percent of children in grades 6 through 9, labelled as bullies, will have at least one criminal conviction by early adulthood (“A new theory on how bullies are made,” *Parent’s Canada*).

A main emphasis on how to deal with childhood bullies involves awareness, on behalf of parents, school staff and childhood peers. Parents are strongly encouraged to watch for red flags, including “*heavy-handed superiority, intolerance of differences and a consistent lack of empathy.*” (“When your child is a bully,” *Today’s Parent Canada*). All signs that your child may be engaging in traditional bullying behaviour.

It is noted in some articles that not all confrontational behaviours should be defined as bullying. Some children simply act on impulse, resulting in a “*spur-of-the-moment*” scuffle (“How to handle preschool bullies,” *Parenting USA*). It is said that friendship disputes, and wrestling matches may get out of hand, but are also considered a normal part of child’s play. This everyday play-related conflict is said to make children stronger because they learn valuable lessons of compromise, forgiveness, and negotiation. It is suggested that one way to tell the difference between bullying and conflict is the intent. Playmates might engage in playful conflict, while bullying is based on the intent to cause harm.

### What causes it?

The common cause of bullying, both traditional and cyber, is said to be the result of children who struggle with control of their impulses. These children are described as being highly reactive, often acting on instinct. Childhood bullies are individuals who have not fully developed an understanding of their behaviours, and how harmful their words or actions can be. It is suggested that childhood bullies lack empathy and an overall sense of moral awareness (*Today's Parent (Canada)*, which directly relates to the notion of children as inherently bad and dangerous).

The role of parents also remained a key factor and cause of bullying. Parents are encouraged to remain in constant contact with their children, while learning the warning signs of bullying behaviour. It is the parent's duty to teach their children proper behaviour, in order to eradicate inappropriate behaviours. It is argued that children sometimes bully others because they are simply modeling aggressive behaviours learned at home, or caused by feelings of helplessness in the child. Parents need to monitor their own behaviour around their children, and what they are inadvertently teaching them.

Certain articles suggested that childhood bullies come from bully parents, and that the bully is often a "*hurting kid*," ("Steps on how to take charge if your child is being bullied," *Parents Canada*) who needs just as much help as the bullied child. In fact, parents were often described as the most important role models. Childhood bullies lack proper social, problem-solving, and cooperative coping skills, thus requiring proper parental guidance. It is stated that, "*if a child is still bullying in high school, they are more likely to carry this behaviour into adulthood*" ("A Nova Scotia program nips bullying in the bud," *Parent's Canada*).

A theory on how bullies are made, proposed by developmental psychologist Dr. Gordon Neufeld in *Parent's Canada* magazine article "A new theory on how bullies are made," suggest that children have two main attachment instincts, alpha and dependent. Alpha is the instinct to lead and provide. Dependent is the instinct to follow and seek. The inner bully is said to take over when individuals with alpha complexes become defended against their personal feelings. The alpha instincts then become "perverted". According to Dr. Neufeld, alphas may also become bullies due to a lack of fulfilling attachment towards an adult, or "*a lack of an adult in a providing alpha role*" ("A new theory on how bullies are made," *Parent's Canada*).

Advice, centered on parents, stressed the overall importance of parental involvement. Common warning signs indicate whether your child is at an increased risk of becoming a bully and include: lack of compassion, frequently on the defense, enjoyment in feeling powerful, and a lack of proper coping skills. Defined as a problem through the ages, the characterization of bullying as a repeated attack of one child against another weaker child, whether it be verbal or physical, perfectly aligns with Olweus (2013) definition. The reasons behind bullying vary from insecurity, learned behaviours at home, making friends with the wrong crowd, or intense feelings of hurt and/or fear.

In terms of gender stratification, it is suggested that boys engage in physical acts of bullying, whereas girls are "*experts at the emotional and psychological type*" ("Bullying: A problem through the ages," *Today's Parent USA*). Childhood bullies are further described as suffering from self-doubt and an error in thinking.

There was some discrepancy as to whether bullying behaviour in childhood is a normal process of development or not. Psycho-therapist Judith Barr argues that bullying "*has become normalized in our world...children deem it a socially acceptable form of both defense and*

*escape*” (“There’s a bully in you, a bully in me, a bully in everyone: what we need to do about it,” *Today’s Parent USA*). The views presented in this article highlight a much more extremist view of bullying behaviour as Barr criminalizes the behaviour. She further explains how society, in general, uses bullying as a form of defense:

*“Terrified of feeling, our society relentlessly defends against feelings. Food, cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, exercise, sex, work, television, computers...are all used as defenses. And all have painful consequences. Murder, suicide, and other violent crimes are extreme and dangerous forms of defense and escape from feelings. Bullying now fits into this category”* (“There’s a bully in you, a bully in me, a bully in everyone: what we need to do about it,” *Today’s Parent USA*).

Barr explains how childhood bullying can lead to domestic violence in families, priests molesting children, and teachers bullying students under the “*guise of discipline*” (“A return to school but not to bullying,” *Today’s Parent USA*). These views of bullying presented by Barr remain rather inconsistent with rest of the articles on bullying in childhood.

Bullies lack empathy, children “*who live in chaotic homes may be more prone to becoming a bully.*” (“Not my little angel. Is your child the class bully? 5 signs of a bully,” *Today’s Parent USA*). It is suggested that children who live in chaotic homes, due to things such as divorce or unstable relationships, may have the potential to become bullies. They exert their fear or frustration through inappropriate behaviours, and social media sites continue to remain an easy outlet for bullies to exert these behaviours. Bullies are children who are unsure of the best ways to communicate their feelings, and may be hurting inside, so they want your child to hurt too. A bully is characterized as a child, just like everyone else, who seeks to bully certain children who are thought to be weak and suffering from low self-esteem.

### What are its consequences?

In speaking up against bullying, it is argued that the more a child witnesses or experiences bullying, the “*greater their risk for internalizing problems,*” (“How to stand up to bullies,” *Canadian Family*) which includes depression and social hopelessness. Childhood bullying is said to resemble a much deeper issue that is bothering your child. Bullies may struggle with controlling their impulses, becoming highly reactive when frustrated. In consequence, parents are on a constant watch, walking on eggshells in fear of the next outburst (*Today’s Parent Canada*).

Developing children often lack empathy, as they have yet to develop an understanding that the way they are treating someone is not right. Anger is said to be “*an outward display of underlying sadness or fear*” (“How to handle mean girls on the schoolyard,” *Today’s Parent Canada*).

### *Cyberbullying*

Social media is a catalyst for newer forms of bullying, commonly referred to as “cyberbullying.” Cyberspace remains a key tool in which children’s relationships are “*built or broken*” (“Cyberbullying,” *Today’s Parent Canada*). It is also regarded as a space in which the schoolyard bully can virtually follow your child home, harassing them via cell phone or lap top. According to one article, cyberbullying “*mirrors what’s been happening on the playground for decades*” (“Cyberbullying,” *Today’s Parent Canada*). This higher-tech version of gossiping, rumors, and social shunning is said to reflect a type of psychological bullying. It can result in depression, anxiety, and a reluctance to go to school. Online bullying can cause children to be meaner than they would be in person, as their computer screens act as a form of protection from



experiencing the real emotions of victims. When a child experiences cyberbullying, it is not just the children at school who witness it, but rather an entire online community. The main issue is that when children congregate online, adults are typically not present to monitor the behaviour and set standards.

It is suggested that “*virtual victims and bullies are more likely than other kids to use alcohol and drugs*” (“Cyberbullying,” *Today’s Parent Canada*). Thus, it is the parent’s responsibility to intervene. Children also learn what they live, and in an online world, they learn from “*more people and places all at once*” (“Be kind: raising kids in an online world,” *Today’s Parent Canada*). The main goal is to take away the power of the bully, by putting your best self forward online. Teachers, parents, students, administration, and the community need to work together to remove certain obstacles. The biggest obstacles include: children who don’t want to “rat out” their school mates, parents who do not believe their children, continually changing rules, lack of community involvement, and the tendency to think that “*supervision means spying*” (“Bullying 101: *Parenting USA*).

Varying opinions on the cyberbullying epidemic continue. The main issue is determining specific consequences and punishments for such behaviour. There remains a challenge in establishing clear definitions of what cyberbullying is, and how it should be dealt with. It is argued that social withdrawal, bad behaviour, and a fear of technology remain clear signs that your child may be experiencing cyberbullying (*Parenting USA*).

### *Traditional Bullying*

The intensity of bullying in childhood was a common theme, as several articles discussed its consequences and repercussions. It is stated that, “*bullies are the enemy and must be stopped*

*at all costs*” (“Bully free- be the one to help kids,” *Parenting USA*). Red flags include: changes in behaviour (sudden moodiness, jumpy, spacey), drop in grades, or reluctance to go to school. Physical ailments include: bad dreams, bruises, and torn clothes.

It is argued that bullying can actually make children sick. Children who are bullied are seemingly more likely to experience bed-wetting, fatigue, depression, anxiety, and stomach pain. In fact, both bullies and victims are said to be at an increased risk of suicidal thoughts. Childhood bullying is said to have a significant impact on a child’s physical development as well. According to one study, “*children who experience extreme violence at a young age have a biological age that is much older than other children,*” meaning that bullied children “*could be on a faster track to an early onset of adult diseases*” (“Study: bullying causes kids to age faster,” *Parenting USA*). This directly relates to the biologizing of childhood. In conjunction with the literature, individuals have less freedom of choice, while beginning to anticipate and prevent the emergence of illness in childhood (Peterson 2003).

#### What can be done about it?

For all of the magazines, increased awareness and communication was a key form of action. Both educators and parents were commonly instructed to shift their focus to the roles of bystanders. If your child has witnessed bullying, parents are encouraged to teach their children various ways to engage in conflict resolution. The main goal is to take away the power of the bully. Parents and teachers are encouraged to address the key issues of bullying with their children, and ensure both the emotional and social safety of their child within educational settings and online. It is all about parental control, as it is further suggested that other children may mistreat your child because they are lacking a prominent adult figure in their own life.

Parents are strongly advised to eradicate the behaviour. The implications for children who are at-risk of being bullied or becoming a bully commonly included: risk of depression, anxiety, stomach ache, headache, social exclusion and social with-drawl (*Today's Parent Canada, Today's Parent USA, Canadian Family, Parenting USA & Parents Canada*). Childhood victims and bullies risk social shunning, and an overall difficulty in maintaining proper relationships with peers. It is suggested that bullies and victims are at an increased risk of engaging in alcohol and drug use ("Bullying 101," *Parenting USA*). Parents are encouraged to monitor their child's behaviour, remaining on a constant watch, in fear of the next outburst.

Advice directed towards parents, explained how individuals can protect their children from the effects of bullying, as well as recognizing the signs of a bully. Largely based on personal accounts, advice on recognizing whether or not your child is a bully included: getting the whole story, figuring out what is going on with your child, and reinforcing positive behaviour. Blame is placed at the parental level.

Certain articles encouraged parents to seek professional help, in eradicating bullying behaviours. As the independency of children has declined, one article suggests;

*"If nothing is working- discussion, consequences, even school intervention- then it may be time to seek out a professional who can explore what's behind the bullying. Ask your child's school counsellor or your family doctor for recommendations and look for a therapist who supports your child and approaches him without judgment. In a tiny percentage of kids, they may have some sort of diagnosable behaviour problem"* ("What to do if your child is accused of bullying others," *Canadian Family*).

This quote illustrates the biomedicalization of childhood behaviour. It is suggested that parents look to counsellors or doctors in determining a specific reason for the deviant conduct. It is suggested that some bullies may be suffering from a diagnosable behavioural issue.

Overall, there was less emphasis on professional help, and more emphasis on parental involvement. It is argued that *“the earlier a behaviour is dealt with, the more likely that later difficulties can be prevented”* (“When your child seems out of control: School age,” *Parent’s Canada*). Parents are said to play a significant role in *“ensuring their kid’s don’t become bullies or victims of bullying”* (“A Nova Scotia program nips bullying in the bud,” *Parent’s Canada*).

### *Cyberbullying*

In properly protecting children from the threats of online cyberbullying, parents are instructed to talk to their children about the dangers of being online. This includes: permanency of information posted online, limiting screen time, and as a general rule of thumb to remember, *“if you wouldn’t want your grandmother to see it or hear it... you shouldn’t post it, text it, tweet it or send it”* (“Cyberbullying,” *Parenting USA*).

Further statistics indicate that 75 percent of bystanders give positive attention to the bully, which in turn, reinforces the controversial behaviour. Teaching your child assertiveness remained a key theme. When it came victims, one article discussed the best way to deal with bullies, through humor. As bullies tend to choose targets based on a victim’s inability to fight back, engaging with a bully using techniques of humor can result in conflict resolution (*Parent’s Canada*).

In putting an end to bullying, the role of “bystander” remained a common theme. It is argued that both educators and parents are shifting focus to the roles of bystander in examining

*“how they contribute to the culture of bullying”* and also at their *“power to shut it down”* (“How your kid can help stop bullying,” *Today’s Parent Canada*). Bystanders are encouraged to find their courage in speaking up against bullying. It is claimed that bystanders are also emotionally affected by bullying. When a bystander intervenes, *“the harassment stops within 10 seconds in more than half the instances”* (“How your kid can help stop bullying,” *Today’s Parent Canada*).

As children continue to learn and grow, parents are strongly encouraged to open the lines of communication, ask about particular friends, and watch for changes in behaviour, including reluctance to engage in certain activities. Children are continuing to explore who they are within their own peer group dynamics (*Today’s Parent Canada*). As a result, during this developmental period they tend to use the word “friend” fairly loosely. Through parental engagement, parents are instructed on how to help their child understand real friendships. Boys tend to organize clubs, whereas girls participate in cliques, for the sole purpose of excluding certain peers.

Helicopter parenting is another common theme, as it is suggested that *“in the past, we believed that kids should be able to handle bullying on their own- but now we know they need adult intervention”* (“Standing up to bullies,” *Today’s Parent Canada*). Middle class parenting styles place greater emphasis on supervision and nurturing, as the overall independence of children has declined. Parents are to remember that *“...it takes a village-school, relatives and friends- everyone needs to work together to protect our children from getting bullied and from becoming bullies, too”* (“Should parents be held accountable for their kids’ bullying,” *Parenting USA*).

Key advice for children and parents when dealing with childhood bullies was consistent. Parents were strongly encouraged to intervene and take charge, by letting the child know that you *“have their back”* and becoming *“more sensitive to the way that our children think and react*

*to danger and threat*” (“Bullying 101,” *Parenting USA*). The U.S government holds an annual Bully Summit, allowing for collaboration between the departments of education, agriculture, justice, health and human services, and defense and interior. This summit tackles the travesties of current educational systems, and the students who fear for their safety at school. According to the Department of Education, “*out of the 46 states with anti-bullying laws in place, 36 have provisions that prohibit cyber bullying and 13 have statues that grant schools the authority to address off-campus behaviour that creates a hostile school environment*” (“New report on anti-bullying laws,” *Parenting USA*). The main goal is for every child to feel safe at school, and address the basic issues of bullying with parents. This was a key concern as parents are encouraged to call to action by demanding the emotional and social safety of their children within educational settings. In fact, the Annual Bully Summit remained a key theme, as several articles within the American parenting magazines made a direct reference to this summit.

Parents are to engage in a dialogue with their child, by asking much more specific questions. This can include: “*what kinds of cliques are there at your school?*” or “*do you feel like there are a lot of rumors going around?*” (“How to talk to your kids about bullying,” *Parenting USA*). In doing so, parents of bullied children must “*act quickly, professionally and must be very clear about expectations- the bullying needs to stop*” (“Parents take the lead to prevent bullying,” *Parenting USA*).

Parents are also instructed to become their child’s “bully coach.” Tips include: teaching your child to not blame themselves as often times bullies do what they do because “*it makes them feel good,*” teaching proper body language in order to exude confidence, teaching them their own “snappy comebacks” as self-defence, and role play, by having your child take on the role of the bully, while you (parents) take on the role of target (“5 steps on becoming your

child's bully coach," *Today's Parent USA*). Being your child's "go-to person" encourages them to feel safe in telling you about any incidents at school ("Five tips for bullied tweens and teens- from a bullied kid who grew up," *Today's Parent USA*). It is also important for parents not to be "inadvertent" bullies. This includes words or actions that make a child feel bad about themselves.

## DISCUSSION

These findings reveal the ways in which childhood bullying is constructed within popular parenting magazines. Bullying is commonly portrayed as a universal issue of childhood, occurring most often on childhood playgrounds and/or within the classroom setting. Blame is placed at both the child and parental level. Children are viewed as problems to society, as social constructions seemingly portray children in negative ways. Parents are also held responsible for their child's deviant conduct. Parents are to remain in constant contact with the child, by engaging in proper parenting practises. This commonly included: opening the lines of communication between parents and child, and monitoring your child's behaviour, both in the classroom and online. Bullies, victims, and bystanders were represented throughout the articles. Advice centered on parents, and what they can do to eradicate bullying behaviour in childhood. The parental role is to identify whether your child is a bully or victim. This can be done through examination of your child's behaviour patterns. Childhood victims are said to display certain behaviour patterns, including: anxiety, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, and stomach ache (*Today's Parent (USA), Today's Parent (Canada), Parenting USA, Canadian Family, Parents Canada*). Bullies display aggression, anger, and a need for power and control. The bystander also remained a common theme, as parents and educators are encouraged to teach their children how to properly intervene within various bullying episodes. The main goal is to take away the power of the bully.

The discourse within these magazine articles reflect the current literature on bullying. The common characterization of childhood bullying reinforces Olweus' (2013) definition. Bullies seek to attain power and control over their victims, through repeated acts of aggression. The intent is to cause harm, whether it be physical or verbal. Children are described as being highly vulnerable, and at risk of becoming a bully or victim. The childhood bully does not come from any particular background, however, certain articles suggest that the childhood bully may be a hurting child, or come from a background in which parents display the behaviour at home. The childhood bully is described as a child in need of parental guidance and intervention. Bullying does not discriminate, it is suggested that all children are at risk of becoming a bully and/or victim.

Both intensive mothering and helicopter parenting were common themes throughout the majority of articles. As mothers tend to remain the primary nurturer and caregiver (Yok-Fong 2010), previous literature has continued to emphasize the needs of children. By remaining in constant contact with the child, mother-child relations are said to improve. This optimizes healthy child development, and increases parent-child bonding (Dinero et al., 2008). As the parental role is to open the lines of communication between parent and child, it is also the parent's duty to ensure proper child development, which includes the eradication of deviant conduct. In alignment with Furedi (2002), this new era of childrearing is often characterized as "paranoid parenting." The notion is that children are increasingly unable to survive without the presence of an adult figure. Through constant supervision and parental intervention, it is argued that children will refrain from engaging in various forms of deviant conduct. In problematizing this issue, the implications of childhood bullying for parents is that it remains the parental responsibility to intervene and to always be on the look out for problem behaviours.



Few articles encouraged parents to seek out any underlying issues for their child's bullying behaviour and deviant conduct. One article suggests that, in a small number of cases, diagnosis can be made. In utilizing a medical paradigm, depression was a common theme, as parents are strongly advised to monitor their child's behaviour for signs of depression, including: lack of appetite, sleeplessness, and social withdrawal. Childhood depression is said to affect both the victims and bullies. With the biomedicalization of childhood, these themes portray how culture shapes ones' beliefs, and reinforces certain parental assumptions (Bursztyn 2011).

The social construction of childhood bullies portrayed within the magazines is consistent with the literature. Children are commonly viewed as problems and nuisances to society (Rosier 2009). Children who violate the code of proper public behaviour (Cahill 1987) are viewed as a disruption to the public. The increased need for nurturing and supervision, on behalf of parental figures, is viewed as the primary solution to controlling deviant conduct in childhood.

The main implication of these social constructions is the fact that childhood bullying is portrayed as an urgent, social problem. As concerns about bullying increase, children may be more at risk of being labelled deviant. Childhood freedom may also be compromised as the view of children as both vulnerable and problematic leads to constant monitoring. This could affect their ability to negotiate relationships with peers. The implications for parents suggests even more intensive parenting, monitoring, and risk management. The results also assume that parents can control children's behaviour. This is not a realistic assumption. Intensive parenting already takes a toll on parents.

In terms of sociological contributions, the decontextualisation of bullying throughout the magazines resulted in a lack of context when examining specific bullying episodes. The assumptions of gender, race, and class were not considered. Traditional bullying was

characterized as a common occurrence, affecting children regardless of sociodemographic backgrounds. With a lack of compartmentalization, the results portrayed bullying in more general terms.

The contradictions of parenthood and childhood perpetuate common notions of society, and parent-child relations. It is important that we not take these assumptions for granted, and continue to question the information being presented to us as truths. The results of this research study demonstrate the social constructions of childhood, and how childhood bullying has become viewed as a growing, social problem.

## **CONCLUSION**

Examining the social constructions of bullying behaviour in childhood remains an important area of research. The issue of bullying is a growing problem, affecting children and parents alike. In continuing this research, it would be of great benefit to examine social media and the internet. Popular anti-bullying websites could be examined in order to better understand the social constructions of childhood bullying.

This research has demonstrated the ways in which bullying behaviour is commonly portrayed amongst popular parenting magazines. The findings offer insight into the ways in which parental advice literature understand childhood and the social constructions of bullying. As expressed earlier, popular media has the capacity to affect common notions and ideologies throughout society. Popular literature can implicate parental understandings. The basic questions guiding this investigation facilitated this discourse analysis, allowing for an in-depth examination of the texts.

In conclusion, this research project has demonstrated how various forms of childhood bullying are commonly portrayed. The rise in both traditional forms of bullying, and cyberbullying have demonstrated how this issue has developed within educational systems.

Further research in this area is needed, as it was not until more recently that the trend of bullying, in particular cyberbullying, became a popular topic amongst parenting literature. The topic of childhood bullying is gaining in awareness, and will likely continue to do so, as social media sites remain a common mode of socialization among youth.

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