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**The Social Construction of Childhood Bullying Through U.S.  
News Media**

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# The Social Construction of Childhood Bullying Through U.S. News Media

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## ABSTRACT

For the past ten years, childhood bullying has been heavily discussed in public discourse, through increased news reporting, discussion in awareness campaigns, and court proceedings. The characterization of bullying in the media is symptomatic of this discourse; moreover, it reflects the social construction of bullying. In particular, news media's emotional and scientific portrayal of bullying has inspired criminalization of the act and defined bullying as a normative trend of deviant behavior—a marked difference from its previous portrayal as an isolated but treatable act. In this paper, I report the findings from a content analysis of articles from mainstream U.S. news sources on lawsuits regarding bullied children, suicides of bullied children, anti-bullying laws, and peer aggression research and prevention. The articles display narrative tropes that emotionally and didactically implicate the reader, and re-appropriate popular notions of psychology to schematize bullying situations. This research demonstrates that the definition and scope of bullying are largely indebted to the representation in the media and people's relationship thereto. These processes have important implications for bullying's effects and treatment.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

A longtime bane of childhood, the bully has for decades appeared in American cartoons, television shows, movies, and books, and while altogether common, was purportedly rare and particular to a given community, as the “town bully.” Yet in the past ten years, bullying has gained notoriety as a type of behavior, increasingly common and dangerous. It has been discussed and defined at a larger level in non-entertainment media, through increased reporting in the news and discussion in awareness campaigns. National Bullying Prevention Awareness Week, begun in 2006 by the National Center for Bullying Prevention, has evolved into National Bullying Prevention Month, every October. Forty-nine states have anti-bullying laws on the books, a trend that began in 1999 and gained steam in 2001. The normalized search value of the keyword “bullying” in Google Search rose from a high of 50 in 2009 to a peak, 100, in 2012, according to Google Trends.

I analyze articles from mainstream news sources on lawsuits regarding bullied children, suicides of bullied children, anti-bullying laws, and peer aggression research and prevention. The first two article types are frequently written as a story of character, and the latter two typically endorse current trends from the fields of child psychology, educational psychology, and social health. I now demonstrate that these rhetorical approaches provide a dramatic and didactic framework for the discussion of bullying.

I then briefly discuss bullying’s portrayal in the news media, in particular its shift from a naturalized strong ailment to a foreign weak enemy. Bullying is rhetorically defined as inevitable yet avoidable or treatable. To this effect, the dramatized interaction of the bully and the victim provides a conflicting symbolic framework in which the viewer engages dually with the characters and with his socially constructed self.

Although bullying awareness is undeniably heightened, the casting of bullying in such a wide net, its redefinition as an epidemic, and its criminalization entail a fundamentally different and potentially blindsided approach to the problem. I take an interactionist approach to the phenomenon of bullying and its definition and treatment, coupled with the methodologies of folklore and media studies, to demonstrate that the definition and scope of bullying are largely indebted to its representation in the media and people’s relationship thereto, and these processes have important implications for bullying’s effects and treatment. Upon understanding the phenomena of bullying and its social construction, we may work further towards preventing it and the mental illness and suicide that sometimes result.

## **THE HISTORY OF BULLYING**

Prior to 2005, only 15 states had anti-bullying laws; the first was passed in Georgia in 1999. A flurry of anti-bullying programs, including the Empower Project in D.C. and Operation Respect in New York, and awareness events such as National Bullying Prevention Week and No-Name-Calling Week, developed after extensive coverage of the 1999 Columbine High shooting and its victims-turned-offenders. In 2005, eight states added anti-bullying laws, spurred by a high-profile lawsuit against the Tonganoxie, Kansas school board (filed in 2004, plaintiff Dylan Theno eventually settled for \$440,000) and the Red Lake High shooting (on March 21, 2005 in Minnesota, by Jeff Weise). More laws have been passed or modified each year; currently all states but Montana have such laws, which prohibit the act of bullying, require school boards to implement prevention and reporting methods, and in some states, require teachers and administrators to report incidents to police. The years 1999 to 2005 define a time in which bullying was considered a social ill, an indicator of depression and anxiety, and a predictor of

school violence. News coverage of Weise focused on his preoccupation with the Internet, Nazism, and Goth culture; Monica Davey and Jodi Wilgoren, writing for the New York Times on March 24, 2005, give only passing mention to his unhappy school life:

Mr. Weise, who had been held back in school, was teased because he was larger than most of the other sophomores, because he dressed in Goth style and wandered around by himself, and, Mr. Tahahwah said, because of his parents' fates. Everyone at Red Lake knew about that.” [Davey and Wilgoren 2005]

Interestingly, stories about the offenders rarely discussed the academic study of bullying or any measure of its frequency, although such studies began in the 1970s with the pioneering work of Dan Olweus.

In 2006, 13-year-old Megan Meier hanged herself after a series of devastating encounters with a stranger on MySpace. The incident inspired a specification of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act in the Missouri statute 565-090, after prosecutors finally received a grand jury's indictment of Lori Drew, the owner of the MySpace account, in 2008. That same year, the parents of 12-year-old Brandon Myers, who hanged himself after years of teasing about his physical disabilities, filed suit against the Blue Springs, Kansas school board, following the precedent of the Tonganoxie case. A widely dispersed AP story about the Myers death brought nationwide attention to a suicide of a bullying victim; this time, there were no Nazi sympathies or Goth inclinations to discuss or blame, and bullying was the only explanation for the teenager's violent action. Meanwhile, nationwide scorn accompanied the local attacks on the Drews' home, as the American public interacted with the constructs of cyber-life, electronic harassment, and teenage angst. Tellingly, headlines referred to the case as “the MySpace suicide.” The year 2008 would thus mark a sea change in the public perception and media construction of bullying.

Between 2008 and 2011, there were at least forty suicides by children who had been bullied. Over 30 bullying-related suicides were reported in 2010 alone. It is difficult to assess the frequency of bullying-related suicides before 2008 due to keyword restrictions: before that year, news articles about child suicides did not mention bullying even if it was a factor, and national data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention do not record the reported causes of suicide. Moreover, news coverage of individual suicides may not have been as extensive if it was considered less newsworthy. Bullying has become a go-to explanation for the tragedy of child suicide. Interestingly, news coverage of the last jump in child and teen suicide rates focused on experts' concerns that “black box warnings” had discouraged psychiatrists from prescribing helpful drugs (Childs 2007). The rates have varied only slightly since 2004, averaging 6.9 suicides per 100,000 persons aged 15 to 19 years; similar trends appear when the sample is enlarged to 10 to 24 years. Overall, rates are still lower than they were from 1990 to 2000. Public interest, however, has dramatically increased: the search terms “bullying + suicide” were entered more often during March, April, and November of 2005 (the Jeff Weise shooting and fallout, and the publication of a German study on bullying, respectively), November 2007, April 2008, April 2009 (the Mohats sued for the suicide of their son Eric), and have remained higher from 2010 to the present, with peaks at April and October of 2010 (on the heels of the charges against Prince's and Clementi's bullies, respectively), November 2011 (Jamey Rodemeyer's suicide and its celebrity response), and October 2012. Because many of these events occurred near the end of the month, many relevant searches were recorded in the following month's data. Interestingly, the combined search term “teen + suicide” last reached 50

percent of its peak value in November 2008, but was at its peak in 2004, the earliest for which Google Trends data is available. The trend of the term “bullying” by itself follows a similar pattern to its use with “teen,” confirming that bullying is associated with children and teens (See Appendix B).

### **THEORETICAL ORIENTATION**

Folklore studies, previously the hallmark of salvage ethnography, is now an essential pursuit of anthropologists who are studying culture through interaction. Cultural products such as myths, artwork, and idioms have historically been of interest to structuralist and symbolic anthropologists, who attempt to analyze them as a reflection of the producing society’s structure and ideology. However, the theoretical work of Louis Althusser influenced cognitive anthropologists who focused on the situated model of the encultured mind, rather than the Levi-Straussian model of a culture defined by the universal mind. Having accepted that cultural products import and transmit ideology among members of a society, the next logical step of inquiry was to combine the study of cultural products with the situated model.

Considering the dissemination of cultural information through a newly diversified set of media, an anthropological definition of folklore must now include all textual products for a consuming public, and the analysis must include the relational context, much as salvage ethnographers would consider the social construction and significance of the storytelling act. While the United States still sees a strong oral tradition, new technologies of text transmission and the proliferation of audiovisual storytelling media means that the methods of folklore studies may now be applied to film, theatre, music, books, magazines, newspapers, television programs, cartoons, comic books, and Web memes. Because these media are mass-reproduced and widely distributed (limited, of course, by socioeconomic factors such as literacy and technological access), they must be studied in both social context and their medium. The social construction of the medium defines the possible and acceptable modes and rules of interaction with the product. In applying Charles S. Peirce’s system of semiotics to linguistics, we see that:

[t]he analysis of communicative practice involves minimally a set of three moves, an initiation, a response, and a follow-up that confirms or disconfirms what is said. Interpretation in such exchanges involves two sets of signaling mechanisms: symbolic signs that communicate by grammatical and lexical rules; and indexical signs that communicate by virtue of conventionalized associations between signs and context, associations that have been established through previous communicative practice. [Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 2005:282]

Here, practice refers to action mediated by symbols. All textual media is subject to these processes; a product initiates a message, which is interpreted in the viewer’s mind according to social knowledge (the signs) in an individualized cultural matrix (the index). Moreover, the product is enforced by its repeated consumption and social dissemination.

For the purposes of this research, I limited myself to newspapers and their Web-born equivalent. “The news” has two important communicative powers: that descriptor signifies factual information, and the act of reading news immerses one into an interaction between a news entity and the cultural index as specified in one’s mind. While the interaction between each person and each news article at any given event of reading is unique, a map of the interactional significance, ideological connotations, and lexical rules may be drawn by the careful study of the

means and rules of news production and distribution, the public consumption of the news, and the text itself.

“The news” in American culture is a symbolic index that employs narrative to unite an implied public. I will further discuss the importance of a narrative shortly; for now it suffices to say that the label of “news story” describes its social power. The implied public, defined by the extent of the paper’s circulation (Warner 2002:50), is both informed and concerned; a newspaper is published solely for the consumption by its selected public. An informed and concerned public is, furthermore, defined by an allowable measure of truth. Most newspapers have an “opinions” section (in newspapers that have gone digital, the opinion section dovetails with one or more blogs); the title of the section denotes content that is less *factually* true, but remains *emotionally* true. In general, the act of writing constitutes truth, in a sense; it is the genre of the work that defines the scope of its truth. In reading a novel, one assumes that the fictional world of the work is an accurate, if imagined, portrayal. In reading an opinion piece, one assumes that the expressed argument is true to the writer’s beliefs and intent, and any discussion of external events is objectively true. A straight news piece is expected to be impartial, thorough, and factually true. This rule is powerful enough to motivate editors to append corrections for even the slightest error in the published copy, as the act of publication is the editors’ tacit endorsement of the truth of the piece.

In Charles Briggs’ insightful exploration of the function of narrative news in documenting and mediating violence in Venezuela, he notes that news coverage of violence has the intended result of inducing the vox populi (2007:326). Briggs suggests that the news “story” becomes an icon of violence, rather than a symbolic discussion thereof, and thus implicates the reader in violence’s truthful occurrence:

Peirce (1932:158) writes that “a great distinguishing property of the icon is that by the direct observation of it other truths concerning its object can be discovered,” referring to this quality as a “capacity of revealing unexpected truth. [2007:331]

Briggs is reluctant to assess iconical violence narratives’ potential for or role in either the “healing” of a nation or a public’s social activism (2007:346), but I would suggest that in the U.S., violence narratives implicate the social responsibility of the viewer and prescribe solutions. As Michael Warner notes, “In the self-understanding that makes them work, publics thus resemble the model of voluntary association that is so important to civil society” (2002:61). On account of this voluntary participation, newswriters not only link themselves to their audience within a common society, but also suggest that the public’s consumption of these narratives both allows for and demands its response to violence. Warner writes, “The appellative energy of publics puts a different burden on us: it makes us believe our consciousness to be decisive. The direction of our glance can constitute our social world” (2005:62).

The discussion of bullying in the news, therefore, implicates the public in its cure. Moreover, newswriters rely on narrative conventions to accomplish the performative goals of storytelling: to symbolically engage with and interpellate the reader. In the words of one newspaper editor, “[Quotes] should be that moment when the reader gains insight and sees truth or at least honesty [and] should never repeat information that can be better explained by a good writer in a narrative. They should capture something special but also move along the story” (email message to author, December 2, 2012). In all societies, stories will produce a culturally mediated emotional response in the reader; newswriters, like all writers, will use strongly connoted words,

according to their intent. When a reader engages with a story, she compares the action of the characters against her own moral expectations, socioeconomic reality, emotional profile, and cultural knowledge, and endorses, rejects, or compromises her response on both the cognitive and situational levels. One must take caution, however, in examining this process, to avoid deconstructing a news article according to a individual-psychological paradigm (Briggs 2007:324), and rather take the language and content of an article to be emergent from intersecting social fields. Moreover, analysis of any referential content must acknowledge that society and history are not simply sums of ad hoc responses and adaptations to particular stimuli, but are governed by organizational and evaluative schemes. It is these (embodied, of course, within institutional, symbolic, and material forms) that constitute the system. [Ortner 1984:148]

While most news stories use the narrative form to engage the viewer, tales of bullying have a particular tendency to appear in tragic form. The appearance of bully and victim archetypes in the entertainment media reflects the social norms that describe the bullying phenomenon, but the response to bullying interactions occurs within a hero–villain framework. This folk dichotomy certainly plays out in news coverage of bullying, but because bullying necessarily has to reach a serious level for an incident to be “newsworthy,” newswriters must resolve the cognitive dissonance produced by the incident through moralization. Hall writes:

New, problematic, or troubling events, which breach our expectations and run counter to our “common-sense” constructs,” to our “taken-for-granted” knowledge of social structures, must be assigned to their discursive domains before they can be said to “make sense.” The most common way of “mapping” them is to assign the new to some domain or other of the existing maps of the “problematic social reality.” [Hall 1980:134]

This is how bullying becomes an “epidemic.” The social power behind bullying necessitates an analysis beyond the sociological. I argue that a practice-oriented anthropological dissection of the narrative of bullying is the answer."

## **METHODOLOGY**

I searched the Internet, Google News archive, and the National Newspapers Core database with the search term “bullying,” combined alternately with “adolescent,” “teenager,” “school,” “suicide,” and “violence.” From the search results I selected 75 news articles, 85.4 percent of which were non-opinion news articles, from nine major newspapers and five major news outlets. I defined a major newspaper as one that is based in a city with a population greater than two million, that has nationwide circulation in print and/or a website readership of over 25 million per month; a major news outlet has over 25 million website visitors per month and/or a network television channel. These parameters ensured that the articles I analyzed had reached an audience large enough that the articles’ ideological content and interactional frame were salient in the majority of U.S. populations.

I then coded each article according to its lexical and semantic content. The lexical content was analyzed with one variable: the number of negative loaded words (see Appendix A). A loaded word is one that carries a strong connotation, evokes an emotional response, describes the context more than the situation, and increases the overall force of the sentence. Examples are the word “pitch-black” instead of “dark,” and “blinding” instead of “bright.” To assess a word’s strength and polarity of connotation, I organized the total list of loaded words extracted from the article into synonymous or functionally similar groups, and asked colleagues to rank the words

from least powerful to most powerful. By examining the loaded words in an article, I was able to assess its relative emotional impact on the reader. Table one clarifies the variables of analysis of the semantic content of the articles:

<b><u>Variable</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>
<b>personal information about victim or bully</b>	Any discussion or quote about the lives of the children mentioned in the article, usually from family members, friends, school administrators, or law enforcement.
<b>story beginning</b>	The article begins with a paragraph written in a novelistic style, marked by descriptive statements of activity, a direct quote, and/or a general statement of character.
<b>negative portrayal of teachers and/or school administrators</b>	Any discussion or quote about inaction, ignorance, or rejection on the part of teachers and/or school administrators.
<b>presentation of teenage angst and disturbance</b>	Any mention of an academic study, expert statement, or statistics that link teenagers' violence and aggression to mental illness or disturbance.
<b>bullying-suicide link / bullycide argument</b>	Any mention of an academic study, expert statement, or statistics that link youth suicide to experience of bullying. Or the term "bullycide" or "bullied to death."
<b>bullying-violence link</b>	Any mention of an academic study, expert statement, or statistics that link bullying by youths to violence as adults.
<b>vilification of bullies</b>	Any discussion or quote by family members, friends, educators, experts, law enforcement, or legislators, describing bullies or bullying in a negative way, categorizing bullying as abnormal, asserting that bullies will be reeducated or martyred, and/or describing the bullies' behavior in loaded words with no counterpoint. Or the term "culture of mean."
<b>frequency establishment</b>	Any mention of an academic study or statistics indicating the frequency and commonality of bullying, in particular the 30% statistic given by the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center.

**Table 1:** variables of analysis of the semantic content of articles.

## **FINDINGS**

In my analysis, 42.6 percent of the articles established the frequency of bullying on a national and/or regional basis. Of these articles, 37.5 percent contained a semantic element associated with the vilification of bullies, compared to 40 percent of all articles. Furthermore, a psychologist, psychiatrist, or other mental health expert was quoted in 33 percent of all articles

that discussed bullies as “cruel,” “mean,” violent, or abnormal, although such statements were not always attributed to the experts. The rate of coincidence of these two elements establishes bullying as both normative in occurrence but deviant in definition. For example, Jonathan Turley, in a 2008 feature for ABC News, writes:

Being a bully remains a popular choice for students, particularly in middle schools, where bullying often peaks. A 2004 survey by KidsHealth found that 40 percent of children from 9- to 13-years-old admitted to bullying. Another recent study prepared for the American Psychological Association showed that 80 percent of middle school students admitted to bullying behavior in the prior 30 days.

After discussing a few incidents of bullying, Turley concludes, “Bullies are not adverse object lessons for an educational system; they are the very antithesis of education.” He makes specific rhetorical choices (rhetoric being the deliberate application of lexical symbols within a specific sociolinguistic context) such as referring to “our schools” (implicating the reader as part of the public) and describing bullies as being “in pursuit of their prey” (a word in a cultural index describing animal relationships).

Of all articles, 41.3 percent contained a semantic element that established blame, ignorance, or disregard for school administrators and teachers. Stories about suicides and/or lawsuits comprised 54.8 percent of these articles, usually because administrators and teachers were named as defendants in the lawsuits, or blamed by the parents in quotes about the victim’s troubles at school. Newswriters’ preference for the personal perspective on an event, especially that of family and friends in the case of a death, explains much of this concurrence. Forty-five percent of the articles expressing a negative view of school faculty and staff also established the frequency of bullying, heightening the former by invoking the reader’s expectations of the modern school in contrast to prevailing assumptions about the truth of statistics. For example, Susan Donaldson James (2009), in an article for ABC News on the Mohats’ lawsuit against Mentor High School in Ohio, cites the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center’s finding that 30 percent of American children are bullied or a bully. She notes, “The family said school officials had been resistant to cooperate in the investigation and had insisted bullying was not a problem; the bullies never showed remorse,” and “[they] took the attitude that ‘they are just being kids, boys are just being boys.’” A quote from a representative of the school district reads, “We don’t believe it’s a problem. . . . We have [the Olweus] program of anti-bullying education to raise awareness for students about what constitutes bullying and differences among students.” According to James, the Mohats complain that Olweus is not effective for high school students, and James corroborates the grieving parents, noting, “[a] 2007 review of the Olweus program in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* concludes that it ‘had some mixed positive effects varying by gender, ethnicity/race and grade but no overall effect.’”

Bullying by definition includes acts of physical and/or psychological violence. Interestingly, only 20 percent of all articles mentioned a study that connected bullying to violent behavior. However, 53 percent of those articles were published before 2008; articles published in and after 2008 mentioned a study that connected bullying to suicide, or included the phrase “bullied to death,” at a rate of 14.6 percent. The year 2008 marked a point of differentiation in the data between a focus on violence against others and a focus on suicide. Only 5.3 percent of all articles discussed both. However, the rates of concurrence for each element with the frequency establishment element were similar: 12 percent for suicide and 14.6 percent for violence. Thus,

articles across the publishing range of the sample normalized the occurrence of bullying, but in the wake of the legal responses to Megan Meier's and Brandon Myers' suicides, newswriters began to interpret bullying in terms of its negative health effects rather than its portrayal as a social ill. Thus began the public's construction of bullying as a foreign, treatable ailment as opposed to a naturalized, deadly condition. Sixteen percent of the pre-2008 articles included both the vilification element and focus on bullying's connection to violence. Overall rates of concurrence between vilification and either the violence or suicide focus were insignificant; however, 14.6 percent of all articles included both the violence focus and the appearance of a psychologist or psychiatrist, or the inclusion of a psychological study. While further research is needed to examine the differential construction of sociologists and mental health specialists, the portrayal of bullying as a violence predictor in the context of a discussion of mental health suggests an unavoidable condition, exacerbated by teenage angst. In a statement for an LA Times article, UCLA psychologist Joan Arsanow said:

Like 90 percent of adolescents who kill themselves, [the victim] probably suffered from depression or another mental illness that left her unable to handle the strong, and typical, desire among teenage girls for friendship. She was also a teenager, and teens are impulsive. [Rubin and Marillo 2005]

The rate of appearance of such statements about typical mental health of suicide victims was overall low (only 9.3 percent), but occurred at a slightly higher rate before 2008. After 2008, the emphasis in stories about teen suicide shifted to their bullies: of the articles that linked bullying to suicide, 66.7 percent were drafted with a story beginning, 50 percent included three or more loaded words to describe the bullying, and 41.6 percent (all published in 2008 and later) included the vilification element. As discussed above, the need to reconcile teen suicides, especially those inspired by bullying, with the expectations of the modern school environment, necessitates that a certain "evaluative function" be built into the stories (Franzosi 1998). By heightening the emotion of the story with loaded words, incorporating folk tropes into a narrative (as the culture of newswriting dictates) and invoking the reader's learned trust in statistics in her encounter with an iconic representation of violence, the newswriter creates a compelling narrative that both relies upon and creates the reader's interactional context. As Robert Franzosi writes, "our ability to go beyond [a narrator's] microcosm depends upon our knowledge of the social relations of his macrocosm (the interplay between text and *context*)" (1998:545).

The implications of these trends in the mainstream news are difficult to assess. At this time, we know that the development of the bullying narrative and the "bullycide" index largely occur in the news media's address of the public, but are not demonstrated in sociological and psychological studies of bullying, which find a correlation between bullying and depression (see Due et al. 2005:29; Kosciw et al. 2011:44) but no causal link between bullying and suicide. Moreover, suicide is overall decreasing among children and teenagers: state-level suicide rates did increase slightly from 2009 to 2010 (average 10.2 percent to 10.5 percent), but are down from 12.3 percent in 2005. However, as discussed above, the number of state-level anti-bullying laws has more than tripled since 2005, increasing criminalization of bullying. This research does not examine predictive or didactic elements of news articles (an area for further research), but informal observation suggests that schools have shifted from compassion and empathy workshops to zero-tolerance policies.

Furthermore, there has been little research done on how bullied teenagers construct bullying

in their relationship to the media. News coverage of Jamey Rodemeyer's suicide identified him as a participant in Dan Savage's *It Gets Better* project, which used social media to empower bullied gay teens. The interaction between a bullied teen and a bullying narrative likely has important psychological effects; some critics have voiced concerns that the media "glamorizes" bullycide by casting the victims as heroes or martyrs against the bullies as villains. One article about Rodemeyer quotes Ann Haas of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: "it can form a narrative that can be compelling" (Thompson 2011).

### **LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

There are several methodological limitations to this research. First, the 75 articles were selected from a pool of search results. In the interest of avoiding duplication and maximizing the variety of events covered within the scope of bullying news, I deselected articles about a particular lawsuit, suicide, or piece of legislation if more than three articles on that topic already existed within my sample. I also deselected most opinion pieces in the interest of analyzing "straight" news pieces, which I considered more relevant to my examination of violence-narratives. With a greater time frame and/or lexical analysis program, I would be able to work with a larger sample; otherwise my sample was necessarily limited. My deselection may cause some distortion in the representativeness of articles as analyzed by the available data.

Second, the sample, although it includes articles dating back to 2005, is heavily weighted on the latter half, with 68 percent of the articles published in 2008 or later. This is partly due to the access limitations of newspapers' Web archives and Google News archives, but mostly, it reflects the proliferation of news coverage of bullying and the increased use of that keyword, particularly to respond to its growing search engine value.

Future research would include a larger sample, semantic analysis of predictive and didactic elements, and comparison of these results with questionnaires on select articles with a focus group.

### **CONCLUSION**

The characterization of bullying in the media is both reflective and symptomatic of its public discourse. The media's emotional and psychiatric portrayal of bullying has increased criminalization of the act and defined bullying as a normative trend of deviant behavior—a marked difference from its previous portrayal as an isolated but treatable act. In addition, teachers and administrators are implicated as risk factors in the repeated bullying narrative disseminated by news media, while research on the social factors of bullying is underrepresented. Changes in the tropes and archetypes of the bullying narrative must be made to provide the consuming public with a broader picture of the bullying phenomenon, in order to develop an ideological framework and social context for a new mediated response to bullying that would contribute to effective responses to bullying.

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**Appendix A**

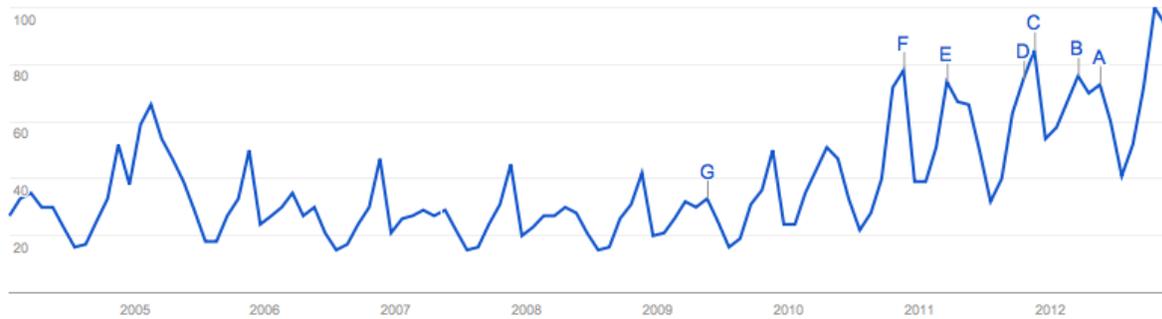
abuse	nightmare
atrocities	overwhelming
attack	poison
bombard	predatory
brutal	prey
cruel	punish
deadly	relentless
despair	ruthless
desperate	savage
destructive	savagely
devastating	scared
distraught	suffer
distress	terrible
hazardous	terrifying
heartrending	terror
helpless	threaten
horrendous	torment
horror	torture
hound	tragic traumatic/traumatized
insidious	utter
intolerable	vicious
lethal	vile
malicious	viper
merciless	vulgar
miserable/misery	

### Appendix B

#### Interest over time ?

The number 100 represents the peak search volume

News headlines  Forecast ?

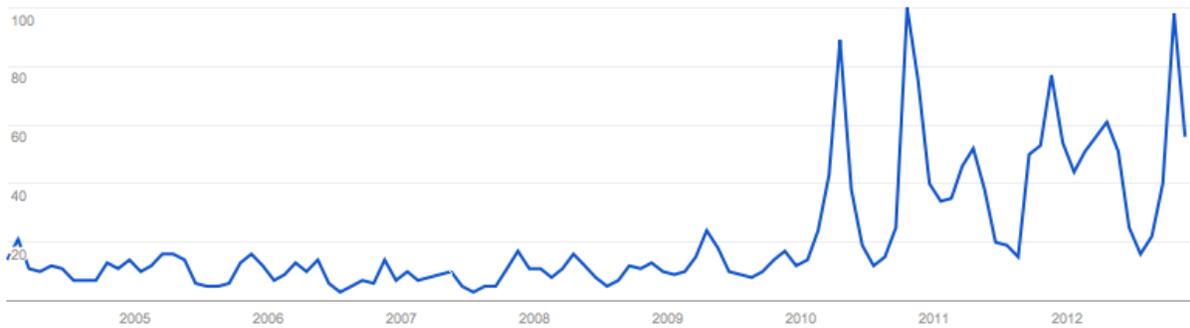


#### Search term: bullying

#### Interest over time ?

The number 100 represents the peak search volume

News headlines ?  Forecast ?

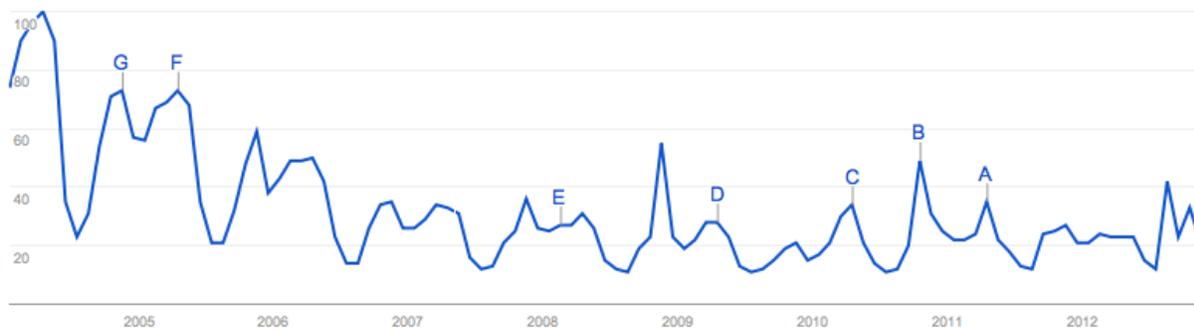


#### Search term: teen bullying

#### Interest over time ?

The number 100 represents the peak search volume

News headlines  Forecast ?



#### Search term: teen suicide