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Introducing the social-ecological model of cyberbullying and uncovering post-secondary students' perceptions of cyberbullying through interviews with young adults

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Abstract

Cyberbullying is a problematic social-digital phenomenon impacting individuals at varying stages of the life course, bringing with it negative and potentially damaging consequences (e.g., increased depression and anxiety, suicide ideation). Despite this, the literature has been plagued by gaps, which have made a complete understanding of cyberbullying out of reach. For instance, cyberbullying scholars have overlooked the digital context (e.g., what aspects and features of digital media help facilitate cyberbullying; the overlap of the digital context with the individual and societal contexts). Also, limited research has investigated cyberbullying occurring among young adults, particularly from their own points of view (e.g., young adults' perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying; cyberbullying prevention and response strategies). Thus, this dissertation seeks to remedy these oversights, thereby making three central contributions. First, I present the social-ecological model of cyberbullying, which is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) and Swearer's and Espelage's social-ecological model of bullying. This new model fully integrates the digital context, highlighting how the digital heavily intertwines with the individual, social, and communal contexts, so much so that the boundaries are blurry. By building the social-ecological model of cyberbullying, cyberbullying scholars are provided with a theoretical model that they can test, finetune, and expand to evaluate cyberbullying more effectively and holistically. Second, drawing from data collected via 21 semi-structured interviews with second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduate students, I uncover post-secondary students' perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying. Alternative to the academic criteria posited in the literature (e.g., repetition; intentional/willful; experienced harm; an imbalance of power), this work reveals a set of key dimensions young adults use to classify cyberbullying behaviours and their corresponding level of severity. These include who was involved, the scope of harm, the context in which the behaviour occurred, and the platform on which the behaviour occurred. Third, again drawing from young adults' perspectives of cyberbullying, I identify key barriers young adults perceive as impacting the development and implementation of cyberbullying prevention and response initiatives on their institution's campus. To remedy these barriers, young adults offered several solutions for how cyberbullying could be taken more seriously and be better handled by post-secondary institutions (e.g., increased cyberbullying-specific awareness and education).

Keywords

Cyberbullying, Social-ecological model of cyberbullying, Digital media, Social media, Digital context, Young adults, Post-secondary, Prevention and response, Cyberbullying initiatives

Summary for a Lay Audience

Cyberbullying is a problematic social-digital phenomenon impacting individuals at varying stages of the life course, bringing with it negative and potentially damaging consequences. Despite the concerns around cyberbullying, the cyberbullying literature has been plagued by critical oversights, which have made a complete understanding of cyberbullying out of reach. For instance, cyberbullying scholars have overlooked the digital context (e.g., what aspects and features of digital media help facilitate cyberbullying; the overlap of the digital context with the individual and societal contexts). Also, limited research has investigated cyberbullying occurring among young adults, particularly from their own points of view (e.g., young adults' perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying; cyberbullying prevention and response strategies). Thus, this dissertation seeks to remedy these oversights to make three central contributions. First, I present the social-ecological model of cyberbullying, which is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) and Swearer's and Espelage's social-ecological model of bullying. In this new model, I fully integrate the digital context to highlight how the digital heavily intertwines with the individual, social, and communal contexts, so much so that the boundaries are blurry. By building the social-ecological model of cyberbullying, cyberbullying scholars are provided with a theoretical model that they can use to evaluate cyberbullying more effectively and holistically. Second, I draw from data collected through 21 interviews with second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduate students to uncover their perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying. Alternative to the cyberbullying criteria used in the academic literature (e.g., repetition; intentional/willful; experienced harm; an imbalance of power), this work reveals a set of key dimensions young adults use to classify cyberbullying behaviours and their level of severity. These dimensions include who was involved, the scope of harm, the context in which the behaviour occurred, and the platform on which the behaviour occurred. Third, again drawing on the interview data, I identify key barriers young adults perceive as impacting the development and implementation of cyberbullying prevention and response initiatives on their institution's campus. To remedy these barriers, young adults offered several solutions for how cyberbullying could be taken more seriously and be better handled by post-secondary institutions (e.g., increased cyberbullying-specific awareness and education).

Co-Authorship Statement

The three articles that make up the body of this dissertation are intended for individual publication. Chapter 2 is an extended version of a co-authored article that will be submitted for publication to a peer-reviewed journal.

The contribution of each author is stated below:

Chapter 2: Illuminating the cyberbullying blind spot: Introducing the social-ecological model of cyberbullying (SEMCB)

Authors: Molly-Gloria Harper (Doctoral Candidate) & Anabel Quan-Haase (Dissertation Supervisor)

Contributions: Analysis and writing were performed by Molly-Gloria Harper. Anabel Quan-Haase supervised the formulation and development of the article, provided comments and feedback throughout the writing process, and edited the manuscript.

Dedication

"This one's for the ones who got me here"

- Cole Swindell

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1. Introduction

Early cases of cyberbullying, such as that of Amanda Todd (2012), Rehtaeh Parsons (2013), and Tyler Clementi (2010), were shocking – their victimization at the hands of cyberbullies left people wondering how and why young people could be so mean to one another. Unfortunately, over time, stories of cyberbullying have become much more common and rarely make headlines, although the harms accompanying cyberbullying have only intensified (Adorjan & Riccardelli, 2019; Hinduja & Patchin, 2018; Yang & Grinshteyn, 2016). Generally, cyberbullying is understood as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through computers, cellphones, and other electronic devices" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015, p. 11). However, since cyberbullying is still regarded as a newer phenomenon, only emerging in the early 2000s (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006), definitions have continued to evolve to encompass a wider range of behaviours (e.g., trolling, flaming, impersonation, trickery, outing, and exclusion), making cyberbullying more of an umbrella term (Betts, 2016; Haynes & Robinson, 2015; Kizza, 2017; Ryalls, 2018). Consequently, what cyberbullying is and what cyberbullying entails remains a point of contention both within academic literature as well as within society more generally. Therefore, it is important for scholars to continue to investigate and better understand cyberbullying, particularly as digital media becomes more prominent in the lives of young people (Perrin & Atske, 2021), making them increasingly vulnerable to experience cyberbullying (Anderson, 2018).

In this introductory chapter, I begin with a review of the literature. Here, I outline how cyberbullying has been understood in the academic literature by discussing the criteria used to distinguish cyberbullying from other forms of online behaviours (e.g., drama). Then, I situate the target age group of focus for this dissertation: young adults. More specifically, I define young adulthood as a distinct life stage from childhood and adolescence. The discussion then narrows to specifically discuss young adulthood relative to the post-secondary transition as post-secondary students are used as a proxy group of young adults in this dissertation research. Carving out the unique post-secondary transition better highlights the life stage of young adults who choose this trajectory and contextualizes their digital media use, subsequently highlighting potential involvement in cyberbullying. Young adults are the focus for this research because, despite the misperception that cyberbullying is a phenomenon largely impacting children and adolescents, young adults are also affected by

cyberbullying. In fact, as a Statistics Canada report on cyberbullying from 2016 shows, one in three young Canadians have been victims of cyberbullying, with those aged 15 to 29 the most likely to be victimized. Therefore, contrary to myths that bullying is a "rite of passage" or something "everyone has to deal with," cyberbullying is a very real and serious issue affecting nearly one-third of Canadian post-secondary young adults (Mishna et al., 2018). Despite this, however, cyberbullying literature remains disproportionately focused on students in the K-12 school system. Next, I identify three problems plaguing the cyberbullying literature, which include cyberbullying as an undertheorized phenomenon, uncertainty around characterizing and evaluating cyberbullying in young adulthood, and overlooking young adults' perspectives. Using these gaps as the motivations for this research, finally I provide an overview of this dissertation.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Understanding cyberbullying

To distinguish cyberbullying from other forms of interpersonal harm, scholars have relied on four key elements to classify cyberbullying: repetition; intentional or willful; experienced harm; and an imbalance of power (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, 2015; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, 2012, 2015). First, one-off incidents like a mean text message are not necessarily cyberbullying; rather the behaviours must reflect a pattern (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Online, this can be done if/when content goes viral, reaching a wide audience in a relatively short period of time (James, 2016; Rockett, 2013), circulating through multiple social networks, coming up time and time again, resulting in repeated exposure to the content (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Second, intent to cause harm refers to acts being willful or purposeful rather than accidental, indicating that the perpetrator of cyberbullying intended to cause undue discomfort, pain, or hurt to the target(s) (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, 2015; Smith et al., 2008). Third, targeted individuals must experience harm, which can vary in level of severity and be a combination of physical, social, emotional, behavioural, or psychological harm (Gini & Espelage, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, 2015).

Fourth, the imbalance of power can be difficult to discern online as physical strength and power are less a factor than in offline bullying (Coburn et al., 2019; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). For cyberbullying, the imbalance of power manifests itself through malicious words, embarrassing posts, or threats of releasing information that could be used against the target (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). An imbalance of power can also be created by differences in size

of online networks, which are attributed to status differences, represented through number of friends or followers (Marwick, 2013; Sheanoda, Bussey, & Jones, 2021; Thun, The, & Cheng, 2021). When cyberbullies have a larger number of people circulating online content, it exponentially increases the potential for engagement, in turn worsening the cyberbullying (Casas, Ortega-Ruiz, & Monks, 2020; Chan, Cheung, & Lee, 2021). In comparison, when cyber victims have smaller online networks, it reduces the potential number of people who can defend them against the cyberbullying (Dredge, Gleeson, & De la Piedad Garcia, 2014a; Tahmasbi & Rastegari, 2018). In this way, cyberbullies utilize technology to be in positions of power (even if temporarily) relative to the individual targeted (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015).

Because of variability in the interpretation of these criteria, and the possibility that context of an act or behaviour can impact perceptions of the existence of these factors (Sheanoda et al., 2021), it is often difficult to discern what is or is not cyberbullying. This is especially true in comparison with more physical or overt forms of offline bullying where criteria are prominent and visible (e.g., height difference between children).[1] While scholars use these criteria to ascertain if an act or behaviour is cyberbullying, there is still a degree of variability in determining if the act or behaviour should be considered cyberbullying. Thus, there remains a need for further investigations into the applicability of these criteria or if young people perceive there to be alternative criteria that better capture cyberbullying behaviours.

1.1.2 A life course perspective: Defining "young adults"

The life stages we experience from birth to death are comprised of a sequence of roles, opportunities, constraints, and events that help shape our lives (Alwin, 2012; Eliason et al., 2015; Shanahan & Macmillan, 2008). However, these do not occur in isolation to one another; rather they are overlapping periods of transitions, dependent upon cultural, social, historical, and political dimensions (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003; Settersten & Ray, 2010; Shanahan, 2000). Over the course of time, the life stages of young adults provoked immense debate, particularly around who ought to be classified as a "youth" in the stages of "adolescence" and "young adulthood" – the periods of time somewhere between childhood and adulthood (Cieslik & Simpson, 2013; Johnson, Corsnoe, & Elder, 2011). This has been

[1] It should be noted that an exception to this is relational bullying – including behaviours like gossip, rumour spreading, social sabotage, and exclusion – which generally goes unnoticed as a more covert form of bullying behaviour (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015).

even more complicated in recent years as scholars suggest young adults are taking longer to achieve milestones that were once markers of the transition to adulthood (e.g., graduating post-secondary, getting married, starting a family), causing them to remain in a semi-dependant state thereby delaying their transition into adulthood (Arnett, 2000a, 2004; Johnson et al., 2011; Settersten & Ray, 2010; Simpson, 2018). As a result, questions remain about the phase of young adulthood.

Life course theorists rely on two main conceptualizations to understand and classify young adults: age-related factors and interpretations or evaluations of young adults' experiences of particular trajectories and/or transitions (Alwin, 2012; Eliason et al., 2015). First, looking at age and age-related factors, definitions are often guided by developmental life stages defined by Piaget and rely on cognitive development (Harlan, 2016; Pulaski, 1980). Here, "adolescence" refers to individuals between the age of puberty up to age 18, and "young adulthood" extends this range to age 25 (Simpson, 2018; United Nations, 2020). However, these age ranges are not definitive as some have classified young adults as young as 12 and as old as 29 (Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services, 2019; Youth Policy, 2014). Therefore, we see great variation and ambiguity when attempting to pinpoint what age groups should be classified as "youths," "adolescents," and, more generally, "young adults."

Relying solely on age has been criticized as ignoring subtle variations and cultural changes taking place, preventing a fuller understanding of young adults. Alternatively, a second approach is to focus on the trajectories and transitions associated with particular life stages (Alwin, 2012; Eliason et al., 2015). When using transitions as markers of movement throughout the life course, age ranges serve as proxies for life stages to capture groups of individuals who share the same/similar experiences (e.g., socialization; accumulation of social capital; identity development) (Benson & Elder, 2010; Buchmann & Steinhoff, 2017; Cieslik & Simpson, 2013). By taking this approach, movement from childhood and adolescence to young adulthood is gradual, consisting of multiple and complex transitions, shifts, and even some reversals of social status, duties, codes of conduct, social roles, and responsibilities (Andrew & Fane, 2019; Morrow, 2013).

Using this approach, young adulthood is characterized as a time when individuals are becoming more mature, facing challenges that they would not face in adolescence (e.g., new responsibilities and obligations; greater demands; greater levels of independence; becoming

self-sufficient) and having experiences that cause them to grow and develop as individuals, yet do not quite reach the levels of maturation associated with adulthood (Bonnie, Stroud, & Breiner, 2015; James & Prout, 2015). Thus, young adulthood is when individuals experience transformative transitions where they gradually enter adulthood (Bonnie et al., 2015; Shanahan, 2000) as they are pushed into new phases of their lives (James & Prout, 2015). Therefore, these transitions – whether it be attending higher education, joining the workforce, starting a family, etc. – are better able to capture what it means to be a young adult rather than age exclusively, particularly because levels of maturation happen over the life course rather than being linked to specific age ranges (Benson & Elder, 2010; James & Prout, 2015; Jenks, 1982).

Common throughout these life stages – from adolescence and into young adulthood – are that individuals are navigating and building their identities. During this time, various educational and social influences and relationships contribute to people's personalities (Cherry, 2020; Maree, 2021). In Erikson's (1964, 1968) eight stages of human development, the first five stages – basic trust vs mistrust, autonomy vs shame and doubt, initiative vs guilt, industry vs inferiority, and identity vs role confusion – relate to early childhood and extend into adolescence, with the fifth stage extending into young adulthood. According to Erikson (1968), identity formation is the most important developmental task, especially in the transition to young adulthood. This is because these periods – from late adolescence into young adulthood – are exploratory life stages where individuals are making important decisions relating to their futures, such as what path in life they wish to take (i.e., choosing to attend post-secondary; deciding what field of study/work to pursue; making potential career choices) (Arnett, 2004; Maree, 2021; Super, 1957). Simultaneously, young people are developing and (re-)negotiating "their sense of self, who they are, their self-concept or self-view, as well as their self-image" (Maree, 2021, p. 1115). Thus, the life stages between childhood and adulthood are crucial as individuals increasingly gain independence while considering their place in society (Sutton, 2021).

It is important to reflect that not all young adults experience the same transitions and trajectories; some attend post-secondary, others focus on finding employment, and yet others get married and/or start their families (Aseltine & Gore, 2005; Ciabattari, 2017). Variability in the paths young adults choose indicates that young adults do not define their progress uniformly (Arnett, 1998; 2000a/b) and that for some, their pathways are not always certain

(Ciabattari, 2017). Rather, young adults assess and make choices based on, among other factors, one's background (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity), parental influence (i.e., education level), financial and social support, and cultural norms and expectations (Belanger, Akbari, & Madgett, 2009; Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016; Looker, 2001). For instance, Lapan et al. (2007) found that when high school students receive career development skills from their supportive networks, such as via parents and school counsellors, they have advantages in young adulthood, such as receiving help and guidance to organize their futures around achieving particular goals (i.e., attending post-secondary education to attain skills and training for their chosen career path). Thus, when individuals have adequate support structures, guidance, and education, they are better able to successfully navigate difficult decisions in their lives, such as which trajectory they ought to take (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1968).

1.1.3 The post-secondary context

Looking specifically at the post-secondary transition, post-secondary environments are unique environments in the life stage of young adulthood, experienced by those who choose to extend their time in the education system. What makes the post-secondary transition unique is that perhaps for the first time, individuals are away from home and becoming accustomed to a new environment, which is a process that largely occurs independently from their parents or established friend, peer, and social groups. During this time, young adults experience what Medalie (1981) refers to as "both *divestment* of the past and *investment* in a new life" (p. 75, emphasis in original). For many attending post-secondary, this may be the first time they are independently making choices on how to spend their free time (Andrew & Fane, 2019; Anic, Rogulic, & Svegar, 2017; Light, 2001) whilst also balancing greater levels of independence and responsibility (Cummings et al., 2006; Ding, 2017; Lenz, 2001). Resulting from these changes, individuals can have difficulty adjusting, which can lead some young adults to experience increased anxiety, depression, or even suicide ideation (Auerbach et al., 2016; Linden & Stuart, 2020; Ontario Universities, 2018).

Coinciding with young adults moving away from home to attend post-secondary, young adults are in phases of their lives where they are building and (re-)negotiating their identities, finding their sense of self, navigating new social roles, and making identity comparisons with others (Chen et al., 2018; Gianesini & Brighi, 2015; Lenhart et al., 2001). As a result, young adults dabble in an array of different activities, expose themselves to new

environments and external influences, and meet a diverse range of people – processes that occur both online and offline (Andersson et al., 2015; Graber, 2019; Smith, Hewitt, & Skrbis, 2015). Since they are forced to step out of their comfort zones as pre-established supportive networks may not be as readily available (i.e., parents or friends from their hometown), young adults may feel immense pressure and stress because of the uncertainty in these new environments and situations (Cossy, 2014; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Paul & Brier, 2001; Schreiner, 2013). For instance, research has found that in attempts to fit in and be liked by peers, particularly in the first semester, young adults may engage in more risk-taking behaviours (Cadigan, Duckworth, Parker, & Lee, 2019). In fact, studies have found that during this time, young adults have higher rates of alcohol consumption (Cadigan et al., 2019; Loxton, Bunker, Dingle, & Wong, 2015) and/or engage in experimentation with and recreational use of illicit substances (Arria et al., 2017; Ford & Pomykacz, 2016; O'Brien et al., 2018). Engagement in such behaviours, according to young adults, help them navigate social dynamics and facilitate friendships, which are important personal goals during young adulthood, and especially in the post-secondary transition (Borsari & Carey, 2006; MacLean, 2016), as well as cope with negative interpersonal interactions, environmental stressors, and academic responsibilities (Boke, Mills, Mettler, & Heath, 2019; Metzger, Cooper, Ritchwood, Onyeuku, & Griffin, 2017).

In recent years, removal from one's established networks has been mitigated by digital technologies. Digital technologies are defined to include digital devices (i.e., computers, laptops, and mobile phones) and social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter) that facilitate connectivity (Nau, Quan-Haase, & McCay-Peet, 2022). Reaping the benefits digital forms of communication provide, young adults maintain contact with established networks more easily and have readily available social support for remedying transition-related stressors, feelings of loneliness, and isolation (Castello de Mesa et al., 2020; Galambos et al. 2018; Quan-Haase, 2007, 2008; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). At the same time, young adults have more opportunities to make new connections with those they meet offline as well as online (i.e., via social groups, virtual communities) (Al Qudah et al., 2020; Drouin et al., 2018; Thomas, Briggs, Hart, & Kerrigan, 2017). Through digital media, young people can build a sense of community as they adapt to their new social environments by gathering in places, both physical and virtual, that they define as their own types of communities (Ellison & boyd, 2013; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; McEwen,

2010). Thus, young adults use social media as key points of access to interpersonal ties – both new and existing ties – who provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and a social identity (Ellison et al., 2007; Brooks & Lasser, 2018; Cho & Yoo, 2017; Kim & Kim, 2017). As a result, digital technologies extend real-world ecologies and add new layers of complexity to the interplay between individuals and their environments.

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, the reliance on digital technologies has exponentially increased (McClain et al., 2021). The routine dynamics of adjusting to and navigating the move to the post-secondary environment (i.e., moving into student residences; attending orientation week activities; navigating campus, courses, and student life in-person) were disrupted as post-secondary students faced new and additional stressors as university life moved online (Smith, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2020). For instance, upper year students were learning how to adjust online after establishing in-person routines years prior. As well, perhaps even more difficult, first-year students were forced to navigate an already tough transition with the added complexities of being online. For the first time, these first-year students were living out their post-secondary transition mostly, if not exclusively online, where they needed to balance academics, social lives, and personal time (Fruehwirth, Biswas, & Perreira, 2021; Lippke, Fischer, & Ratz, 2021).

While digital technologies aid young adults in the transition to post-secondary – and have become instrumental throughout the COVID-19 pandemic – the increased reliance on digital technologies for more purposes such as socialization, free time, and education (Perrin & Atske, 2021), increase the prevalence of cyberbullying (Al Qudah et al., 2020; Gahagan, Vaterlaus, & Frost, 2016; Wright, 2018), and exacerbate the outcomes associated with experiencing cyberbullying (Cunningham et al., 2015; Yoon & Koo, 2020). For instance, resulting from the interwoven dynamics of social life happening online and offline, impressions of individuals are being based heavily on what is posted about them online. When cyberbullying occurs, it could impact an individual's strategies for managing how others perceive them subsequently causing rumors to spread, impacting the wellbeing of the individual targeted (Baldasare et al., 2012; Dredge et al., 2014b). In fact, research investigating cyberbullying outcomes among young adults found that cyber victims experience negative academic consequences (Wright, 2018), social challenges (Crosslin & Golman, 2014; Faucher, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2014), become distrustful of people and digital technologies (Rivituso, 2014), and are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and/or

experience suicide ideation and/or self-harming behaviours (Cassidy et al., 2017; Mishna et al., 2018). These outcomes can be even worse if/when coupled with experiences of racism, homophobia, sexual violence, and other types of harassment (Dodge, 2015; Myers & Cowie, 2017; Yoon & Koo, 2020), all of which are prominent problematic experiences faced by post-secondary students (see Martis, 2020).

Overall, given the complexities associated with the life stage of young adulthood, and the added stress and pressure associated with the post-secondary transition (i.e., being away from home; negotiating identities; changing social relationships) (Wright, 2018), the impacts of cyberbullying can be more intense, severe, and immediate (Cunningham et al., 2015). Part of the reasons for this intensification is attributed to the importance placed on peer relations (Maunder, 2018; Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008), as well as establishing one's identity and reputation, both personally and professionally, within the life stage of young adulthood (Benson & Elder, 2010; Chen et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2017). For example, building stronger, closer peer relationships helps post-secondary students in their adjustment to university life and helps foster a sense of belonging (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Maunder et al., 2013; Maunder, 2018). However, occurrences of cyberbullying can threaten these feelings, leaving students to experience, among other things, isolation, removal from their friend groups, questioning of their identities and where exactly they fit in, and more vulnerability in general (Peled, 2019; Wright, 2018). Thus, when cyberbullying occurs, young adults potentially face an array of serious, lifelong repercussions (see Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2019; Cunningham et al., 2015; Mishna et al., 2018), making such instances more meaningful for those who experience victimization (Peled, 2019; Watts, Wagner, Velasquez, & Behrens, 2017).

1.2 Research problem

Despite a growing body of literature examining cyberbullying, several gaps remain. In this section, I outline three of the most prominent gaps, as these motivate the current research.

1.2.1 Cyberbullying remains an undertheorized phenomenon

Cyberbullying remains an undertheorized phenomenon and lacks a broader, overarching theoretical model that encapsulates the many components, dimensions, and factors that inform our understanding of what cyberbullying is and why it happens (Barlett, 2017; Fluck, 2016; Wright, 2016). In the absence of theory, the literature is plagued by the challenge of explaining cyberbullying (Mishna et al., 2012; Tokunaga, 2010), and is left with many

methodological challenges of how to measure and capture it (Fluck, 2016; Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). In attempts to address this gap, cyberbullying scholars have drawn on various criminological, sociological, and psychological theories to test if and how cyberbullying fits within pre-established theoretical frameworks and what we can learn from using them to theorize cyberbullying. While these existing theories have tried to advance our understanding of cyberbullying, attempted to provide a theoretical backbone for empirical studies of cyberbullying, and articulated pieces of how, why, and among whom cyberbullying occurs, most approaches have one central flaw: these theories omit the intersection of the social and digital and cannot explain the digital context (McMahon, 2014). Thus, these pre-existing theories tend to be better suited for examinations of traditional forms of bullying and/or are only suitable for examining limited aspects of cyberbullying (Barlett, 2016, 2017). Prevailing within the literature, then, is a need for a theoretical model of cyberbullying that aims to consider all aspects simultaneously to comprehensively define, understand, situate, and evaluate cyberbullying. This would allow scholars to examine the many dimensions and/or causal factors that interplay with one another more holistically (McMahon, 2014; Tanrikulu, 2015).

In assessing the application of existing theories to cyberbullying, one of the most prominent theories used has been Routine Activities Theory (RAT), a criminological theory, which assesses cyberbullying as a type of deviant online behaviour. RAT investigates how likely individuals are to commit a crime based on everyday activities and posit three criteria: motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In its application to cyberbullying, scholars suggest that the rise in popularity of online platforms and digital devices has placed individuals in high-risk situations where they are in close proximity to motivated offenders, appear as attractive targets, and participate in spaces lacking guardianship (Bossler, Holt, & May, 2012; Holt & Bossler, 2009). Based on these factors, individuals, prominently those who are active online, are at heightened risk to become victims of cyberbullying (Holt, Fitzgerald, Bossler, Chee, & Ng, 2016). For instance, Navarro and Jasinski (2012) found RAT to be effective in predicting an individual's risk of experiencing cyber victimization, particularly while engaging in seemingly harmless (digital) activities like online research and Internet browsing.

Despite the promise of identifying and pinpointing the likelihood of experiencing cyberbullying, and the factors that tend to heighten one's level of risk (Holt et al., 2016;

Navarro & Jasinski, 2012, 2013), RAT has serious limitations. For instance, Yar (2005) argues RAT has limited utility in explaining deviant and/or criminal behaviours occurring online due to the temporarily disorganized nature of digital spaces, which makes it difficult to identify patterns of convergence of criminogenic elements. This is because RAT mainly focuses on the confluence of crime, that being the coming together of an offender and victim in a suitable location at a particular time (Argun & Daglar, 2016) – something not always possible given the nature of digital spaces (i.e., breakdown of geographic and temporal constraints) (Leukfeldt & Yar, 2016). In addition, criminological theories like RAT have been critiqued in their application to behaviours like cyberbullying because they are often inappropriate to apply to behaviours that may not necessarily be classified as a codified crime[2] (Arntfield, 2015). Finally, and most concerning, RAT has been critiqued as ignoring emotional, psychological, social, and developmental factors that underlie engagement in deviant and/or criminal behaviour (Argun & Daglar, 2016; Wortley, 2010) – all of which have been evidenced as overlapping and pertinent to understanding cyberbullying (Holfeld, 2013; Wright, 2016). Thus, while RAT has particular utility in cyberbullying-related inquiries, it is ill-suited for serving as a guiding theory for understanding cyberbullying more holistically.

More specific to cyberbullying, Barlett and Gentile (2012) built the Barlett and Gentile cyberbullying model (BGCM). This learning-based model suggests that the initial occurrence of cyberbullying can lead to the continuation of cyberbullying behaviours because individuals learn and subsequently develop positive cyberbullying attitudes (Barlett & Gentile, 2012; Barlett, Chamberlin, & Witkower, 2017). In its application, the BGCM has been found effective – and has been argued to be the only empirically validated theory – for predicting cyberbullying perpetration (Barlett & Gentile, 2012; Barlett, Beennardi, Williams, & Zlupko, 2021). However, much research using the BGCM has been focused on adult and emerging adult populations, leaving questions if it will be substantiated in samples of younger age groups (Barlett et al., 2021). Further, the BGCM has not yet been widely used for more expansive examinations of cyberbullying – it remains focused on cyberbullying

[2] In Canada, not all instances of cyberbullying are considered criminal offences (RCMP, 2021). However, there are several legal consequences for cyberbullying. For example, some offences that cyberbullies could be charged with under the Criminal Code of Canada include sharing intimate images without consent, criminal harassment, assault, uttering threats, intimidation, mischief in relation to data, unauthorized use of a computer, identity theft, extortion, counselling suicide, incitement of hate, defamatory libel, and offence against the person and reputation (Government of Canada, 2021; RCMP, 2021).

perpetration – which limits what we can learn about the phenomenon. Additionally, with the BGCM being a psychological model, it often overlooks or fails to capture other factors relating to cyberbullying, such as the influence of social relationships and digital-specific factors (i.e., platform and device-specific variables, and digital skills), which are especially important to consider as cyberbullying perpetration is intrinsically tied to technology use and the learning of digital skills (Parks, 2017).

Addressing the need for consideration of digital-specific factors, scholars have turned to Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G), which suggests digital users have certain needs that guide their choice of digital technologies, and compares the gratifications sought with those obtained (Blumer & Katz, 1974; Katz, Blumer, & Gurevitch, 1974; Ruggiero, 2000). Highlighting U&G's appropriateness for bullying-related research, scholars have found that cyberbullies are goal-oriented and consciously make choices and assessments as to which digital spaces they choose for displaying their aggressions and bully others (Tanrikulu, 2015). This is because different digital technologies afford different opportunities (i.e., anonymity; less supervision; wider audiences), which help to explain the potential gratifications digital users seek and obtain from varying digital media (Chan, Cheung, & Wong, 2019; Erdur-Baker et al., 2016; Palomares & Wingate, 2020). For example, Tanrikulu and Erdur-Baker (2019) found a significant relationship between cyberbullies' motives and their intentional choices of using certain digital technologies when engaging in cyberbullying. This was because online, cyberbullies could be more aggressive, courageous, and dissociative (Tanrikulu & Erdur-Baker, 2019). Looking at social media platforms more specifically, cyberbullies move and shift to popular platforms, ones they know that their victims will be active (Okere & Owolabi, 2020). For instance, Vaterlaus and Winter (2021) found that with the rise in popularity of TikTok, combined with the high levels of agency, there are distinct ways cyberbullying has been facilitated (i.e., cyberbullies strategically participating in TikTok trends; using the duet feature to expose and bully others). However, studies using a U&G perspective to investigate cyberbullying across social media platforms remains limited.

Looking further at the utility of U&G theory, scholars have posited that cyberbullying perpetration motives and engagement with particular digital technologies are interlinked with personality characteristics. For instance, studies have identified several personality traits, such as aggressiveness, levels of empathy, and self-esteem, impact both engagement in

cyberbullying behaviours as well as digital technology use (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015; Orchard, Fullwood, Galbraith, & Morris, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). These personality traits help to motivate negative media use and individuals' problem behaviours (Krcmar & Greene, 2005; Tanrikulu, 2015). For example, anonymity along with having a wider audience on social networking sites has been found to gratify majority of cyberbullies, especially aggression-seeking individuals (Hu, 2016), when their motivations for cyberbullying involve harm, domination, revenge, or entertainment (Tanrikulu & Erdur-Baker, 2019). These findings help validate the underlying mechanisms of U&G theory, illustrating that relationships exist between motives and personality traits where cyberbullies intentionally choose certain technologies to gratify these motives (Tanrikulu & Erdur-Baker, 2019).

While the U&G perspective is one of the first to be used that really considers the role of digital technologies regarding cyberbullying perpetration, its main weaknesses are that we are only given explanations into digital technologies more generally (i.e., offline compared to offline), and that we only become aware of few potential affordances cyberbullies take advantage of (i.e., anonymity). As a result, we remain without a fuller understanding of the broader array of digital-specific factors that could influence the occurrence of cyberbullying (i.e., design of digital devices; features and affordances facilitating cyberbullying; platform-specific variations) (Severin & Tankard, 2001). Additionally, we remain without insight into the overlap of the social-digital because U&G theory tends to neglect broader social structures and the place of digital media within those structures (Severin & Tankard, 2001).

Overall, the application of existing theories to cyberbullying highlights that they have specific utility; however, they do not holistically explain cyberbullying as a phenomenon. Instead, we remain without an overarching theoretical model that situates cyberbullying as a social-digital phenomenon. In such a model, we need to simultaneously include the individual as well as other prominent contexts such as familial, peer, societal, and broader cultural influences (Tanrikulu, 2015) with the digital context (McMahon, 2014). Should such a theoretical model combine these contents – like a social-ecological approach – it would harbour a more comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying (Tanrikulu, 2015).

1.2.2 Clashing perspectives between generations: It is not always cyberbullying

Definitions of cyberbullying vary depending on who is doing the defining (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). Like offline bullying, scholars have found discrepancies between young people, including children, adolescents, and young adults who participate in cyberbullying

(i.e., across social roles including cyberbullies, cyber victims, and/or cyber bystanders), and adults who are not directly involved in the cyberbullying (Crosslin & Golman, 2014; Espelage & Hong, 2017). Rather than relying on the perspectives of younger individuals, most studies draw upon the perspectives of adults like parents (Mesch, 2018; Stives, May, Pilkinton, Bethel, & Eakin, 2019), educators (Beale & Hall, 2007; Campbell, Whiteford, & Hooijer, 2019), and even health care professionals (Carter & Wilson, 2015; Moreno & Vaillancourt, 2017) to define and explain cyberbullying as well as how to address it.

While these studies do offer insights into how adults involved in the lives of young people can assist in cyberbullying experiences and outcomes, relying heavily on adults' perspectives is problematic, particularly because adults are much quicker to use the term cyberbullying without considering the nuanced subtleties and variations in distinguishing types of behaviours as younger individuals do (Demaray et al., 2013). As a result, Milosevic (2017) argues that policies exist targeting children and adolescents, yet because young people are not involved in the curation of them (i.e., created based on their perspectives, opinions, and experiences), these policies do not always appropriately apply. This becomes even more true in the lives of young adults who are in a transitionary period of their lives, moving from adolescence into young adulthood, where parents usually play less of a role as individuals gain more independence and freedom (Al Qudah et al. 2020; Galambos et al., 2018), making adults' conceptualizations of cyberbullying perhaps less applicable (Wright, 2018).

In attempts to navigate how younger individuals characterize their own behaviours, scholars danah boyd and Alice Marwick examined "drama" relative to other forms of conflict like bullying and relational aggression in the context of social networking sites, particularly MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter. They defined drama as "performative, interpersonal conflict that takes place in front of an active, engaged audience, often on social media" (Marwick & boyd, 2014, p. 1191). Findings from their ethnographic study of American teenagers highlights how teens describe their experiences of interpersonal conflict with friends, peers, and/or acquaintances as drama rather than opting for terms like online bullying, cyberbullying, or digital harassment (Marwick & boyd, 2014). Likewise, Mishna et al. (2008) found that despite meeting the criteria for bullying, the adolescents in their study struggled to classify behaviours between friends as bullying, downplaying such occurrences as jokes, not really meaning it, or tolerable out of fear of losing their "friend." Despite findings highlighting that the elements of drama tend to resemble other forms of conflict (i.e.,

bullying; cyberbullying), bullying somehow remains distinct from drama (boyd, 2014; Marwick & boyd, 2014; Mishna et al., 2008). One of the main differences was that drama was perceived as bi-directional, taking place between known individuals, often friends or former friends, who are equal parties involved in the drama, whereas cyberbullying was seen as involving a power differential between individuals not necessarily known to one another (boyd, 2014; Marwick & boyd, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). This implied the importance of contextualizing the behaviour within the dynamics of the social relationship in which it is occurring.

While cyberbullying does not always take place between parties known to one another, or among individuals in the same social groups or who share in social relationships, it usually does (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Wei & Jonson-Reid, 2011). In fact, Felmlee and Faris (2016) found cyber aggression, including cyberbullying, occurred at a significantly higher rate (nearly 5x higher) among friends compared to friends of friends (i.e., peers) and/or strangers (i.e., individuals not known to one another). This statistic could be even higher because some cyberbullying was perpetrated anonymously. But this still leaves the question: if/when does the behaviour (e.g., drama) become cyberbullying? Potential differences and indicators between these behaviours could be severity (i.e., drama is perceived to be less severe), who is involved (i.e., individuals known to one another could void a power imbalance), and immediacy of the harms for those targeted (i.e., drama used until behaviours escalate, which then becomes cyberbullying) (Allen, 2015; Jeffrey, 2021; Lenhart et al., 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2014). By using the label drama compared to bullying, individuals may feel more in control of their experiences and negate the negative connotations associated with the bully/victim labels as seen in cases of cyberbullying (Marwick & boyd, 2014; Nixon, 2014). Despite this speculation, it is tricky to determine with certainty since the boundaries are blurred, and classification depends on many factors that have yet to be clearly articulated within the present body of literature.

All things considered, while it is recognized that some behaviour can be "mean," the term drama allows for young individuals to take control of their own experiences by carving out their own understandings of interpersonal conflict using their own terms (boyd, 2014). This is particularly relevant when looking at young individuals in transitional phases of their lives because cyberbullying is sometimes viewed as something they grow out of with age – they used to partake in it, but now it is "just drama" (Marwick & boyd, 2014). As they get

older, moving from adolescence to young adulthood, drama better situates their experiences of interpersonal conflict without being perceived as juvenile (Faucher, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2014, 2015; Simmons, Bauman, & Ives, 2015). Therefore, with social media serving as an extension of their offline environments, drama tends to better reflect experiences involving interpersonal conflict, whether it be bullying, aggression, or gossip, rather than cyberbullying (Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2019; Marwick & boyd, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2014). This is because terms like cyberbullying are reserved for certain types of behaviours that are, according to young people, qualitatively different from digital forms of drama and peer aggression (Marwick & boyd, 2014; Mishna et al., 2008). Nonetheless, despite agreement that not all drama is problematic, it does have the power to become quite painful, which is when the term drama conceals the more serious and abusive nature of what would be considered cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2014).

While Marwick and boyd's (2014) work has set the framework for discussing interpersonal conflicts and associated behaviours that younger generations today are dealing with and experiencing, the grey area they identified (i.e., the discrepancy between classifying cyberbullying and cyberbullying-like behaviours) is still very much present within the literature. For example, in a study of Canadian post-secondary students, Cassidy et al. (2019) found that students often reflected on the roles of subjectivity and objectivity when defining cyberbullying, indicating there are many factors to consider when determining what is and is not cyberbullying. While Cassidy et al. (2019) did not discuss drama overtly, participants indicated that the nature of the online world has led to challenges distinguishing between perception and reality, differences between online and offline contexts, and complicating social relationships. This may explain why the young individuals in the Marwick and boyd (2014) study indicated that not all conflicts are, in fact, cyberbullying, suggesting that other factors should be considered before labelling behaviours as cyberbullying.

Despite such evidence, scholars have failed to delve deeper into the use of the term cyberbullying by young adults, leaving us with an incomplete understanding of how young adults conceptualize cyberbullying and against what set of criteria they make these decisions (e.g., the same or different criteria used by adults and/or researchers). This prominent gap remains important to investigate given recent evidence suggesting that young adults fail to conceptualize cyberbullying in similar ways to academic-centred understandings (i.e., definitions; criteria) (Sheanoda et al., 2021). However, without opportunities to conceptualize

cyberbullying from their own points of view, Sheanoda et al. (2021) suggest we are left with immense confusion, inconsistency, and uncertainty around cyberbullying occurring among young adults. For example, while we know the context of social relationships between the individuals involved in cyberbullying matters, we are left wondering to what extent and why (e.g., why meanness between friends means something different), and what influence the social environment has on such classification (e.g., why and in what ways context matters within and between platforms). What we need, then, is to give young adults the opportunity to offer insight into their own experiences. By doing so, scholars suggest it will lead to a better understanding of what is going on in young adults' lives as well as the world around them, how they perceive their online behaviours as well as digital interactions, and what they think can be done to curtail harmful or mean online behaviours (Anderson, 2018; Geiger, 2018; Ey, Taddeo, & Spears, 2015). These lines of inquiry are important because young adults can give valuable insights into the digital context. This insight can, in turn, help inform society's understanding of cyberbullying, aid in navigating digital forms of aggression and conflict, and lead to the implementation of more relevant, effective programs and policies (Faucher et al., 2020; Jeffrey & Stuart, 2019).

1.2.3 Cyberbullying among post-secondary students: An overlooked group

A very limited body of research has investigated post-secondary students' understanding, experiences, and perspectives on cyberbullying – including relative to and distinct from drama – even though they are part of the age group most affected by cyberbullying (e.g., between the ages of 15 and 29) (Statistics Canada, 2016), and egregious cases of cyberbullying have been observed among college and university students (Cho & Yoo, 2017; Mackenzie, 2010). Further, several studies have found that while engagement in offline bullying decreases with age, the risk of cyberbullying increases, likely due to more time spent online and social changes during the life course (Lee, 2017; Robson & Witenberg, 2013; Ryoo, Wang, & Swearer, 2015). Despite this, research has likely focused on younger age groups, particularly those in the K-12 school system, because it is more common to think of them as involved in cyberbullying (see Beran & Li, 2005; Mishna et al., 2009; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). As a result, we know very little about cyberbullying among young adults (Myers & Cowie, 2017, 2019; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014).

Looking at the limited research conducted with post-secondary populations, prevalence rates of cyberbullying vary, with studies reporting rates ranging between 8% (Smith & Yoon, 2012) to upwards of 30% (Mishna et al., 2018). For example, in a study of Canadian post-secondary students, Faucher et al. (2014) found just over 20% of university students experienced cyberbullying. Consistent with Statistics Canada (2016) reporting that one in three young Canadians are involved in cyberbullying, Mishna et al. (2018) found 30% of students reported experiencing cyberbullying in a six-month period. Looking at cyberbullying involvement across social roles, the highest rates of cyberbullying involvement were reported by Cunningham et al. (2015) in a study of Canadian post-secondary students where nearly 60% of participants were involved in cyberbullying either as cyberbullies, cyber victims, cyberbully-victims, or cyber bystanders. These studies show post-secondary students are experiencing and are involved in cyberbullying and highlight the need for more focused attention on cyberbullying among young adults (Mishna et al., 2018; Wright, 2018). While it is useful to know and understand the prevalence of cyberbullying, we need to delve deeper to understand how young adults conceptualize and use the term cyberbullying, namely because the facilitation of this type of knowledge is, for the most part, missing or underdeveloped within the current body of literature (Faucher et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2018; Wright, 2018; Sheanoda et al., 2021).

Within current research, we have an ambiguous definition of the term cyberbullying and inconclusive knowledge surrounding it within the context of post-secondary (Myers & Cowie, 2017; Sheanoda et al., 2021). As a result, researchers have taken advantage of traditional definitions and understandings of cyberbullying that were derived regarding cyberbullying among younger age groups, such as those offered by Patchin and Hinduja (2006, 2014) and Smith et al. (2008), assuming they apply to post-secondary students (Alqahtani et al., 2018; Souza, Simao, Ferreira, & Ferreira, 2017). However, these definitions have been critiqued by post-secondary students as being outdated (Crosslin & Golman, 2014), juvenile (Faucher et al., 2014; Simmons et al., 2015), and misaligning with their own conceptualizations of the phenomenon (Sheanoda et al., 2021). As a result, many young adults, particularly perpetrators of cyberbullying, fail to classify their own behaviours as cyberbullying (Faucher et al., 2015). However, no study has yet to clarify what behaviours cross the line between more routine forms of conflict and cyberbullying, or what criteria should be met for a behaviour to be labelled cyberbullying in the context of post-secondary

students. Since a majority of studies have failed to "flesh out the extent, nature, form, and impact of cyberbullying at the university level" (Faucher et al., 2015, p. 104) by neglecting student views of cyberbullying and how it plays out on campuses (Baldasare et al., 2012; Cunningham et al., 2015; Gahagan et al., 2016), we remain without a fully realized picture of cyberbullying, including how cyberbullying compares to other types of mean and/or aggressive behaviours (i.e., drama, relational aggression) – a common, debated issue that still persists within the broader body of literature (Wernert, 2017).

Further, stemming from the oversight of failing to seek young adults' perspectives of cyberbullying more generally, there has been limited research investigating cyberbullying-based initiatives implemented at the post-secondary level both more generally as well as particularly from the perspectives of young adults (Faucher et al., 2020; Vaill, 2021; Vaill, Campbell, & Whiteford, 2020). One can speculate that this gap results from the larger, overarching problem that post-secondary institutions have failed to truly acknowledge cyberbullying as a problem faced by their students (see Faucher, Cassidy, Jackson, Waterhouse, & MacDonald, 2014; Vaill, 2021), and consequently, have developed few initiatives, both in terms of prevention and response, to handle cyberbullying (Campbell, 2015; Cassidy et al., 2019; Faucher et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, when looking at the literature on interventions for post-secondary students, most solutions have been focused on the perspectives of other stakeholders (e.g., educators, lawmakers) (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2017; Nguyen & Mark, 2014), or have been similar to those implemented that target younger age groups (Baldasare et al., 2012; Bauman & Bellmore, 2015; Williford et al., 2013). The problem with such initiatives is that they target cyberbullying as it is understood among younger age groups, making prevention and response initiatives not necessarily applicable to young adults (Baldasare et al., 2012; Faucher et al., 2020; Jeffrey & Stuart, 2019). For example, Williford et al. (2013) evaluated the KiVa anti-(cyber)bullying program, which is a Finnish anti-bullying program rooted in prevention, intervention, and monitoring (KiVa Program, n.d.), with a group of elementary-aged Finnish students. They found that despite the program's success with younger children, the program became less effective as students age. Empirically evaluating age-related differences, Karna et al. (2013) assessed the KiVa program with two groups of students, those in grades one to three and grades seven to nine. They found that KiVa was effective in reducing bullying behaviours among younger elementary students but had less promise with

older students. Thus, it has been determined that programs like KiVA are largely ineffective for those in high school and beyond, namely because young people desire more autonomy and control as they get older (Arnett, 2000a). As a result, strategies such as these would not be effective at the post-secondary level (Cunningham et al., 2015).

Therefore, rather than replicating cyberbullying-focused initiatives for younger age groups, post-secondary institutions need to develop initiatives uniquely tailored to young adults (Baldasare et al., 2012; Cunningham et al., 2015). To do this; however, more research is needed that solicits the perspectives of post-secondary students to uncover what sorts of initiatives they perceive would be effective (Faucher et al., 2020). Doing so would help to ensure solutions are better informed, usable, age-appropriate, and relatable (see Faucher et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2019; Jeffrey & Stuart, 2019; Vaill, 2021).

1.3 The current study: Research questions and objectives

Taking the research gaps into consideration, this dissertation had three primary objectives. First, to address the lack of consideration of the digital context and its interconnectedness with other contexts (i.e., individual, communal, and societal contexts) (McMahon, 2014; Tokunaga, 2010), cyberbullying was situated within its own theoretical model to build the social-ecological model of cyberbullying. To achieve this, I adapted and expanded Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) (1979) and the social-ecological model of bullying proposed by Swearer and Espelage (2004).

The second objective was to empirically examine how post-secondary students perceive and evaluate cyberbullying. Not only have post-secondary students been largely overlooked in the cyberbullying literature (Orel et al., 2017; Myers & Cowie, 2017, 2019; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014), but studies on post-secondary students have failed to articulate students' perceptions of the phenomenon and how they evaluate if/when a behaviour is, in fact, cyberbullying (Cunningham et al., 2015; Faucher et al., 2015; Gahagan et al., 2016). While emerging research has found that young adults' express confusion and uncertain regarding the applicability of academic-centred criteria posited in the cyberbullying literature (see Sheanoda et al., 2021), no additional work has been conducted to offer a potential alterative set of criteria informed from young adults' points of view that more appropriately capture their evaluations of cyberbullying. To address this objective, I focused on answering the following research questions: What points of reference do young adults draw upon to describe and discuss cyberbullying? According to young adults, to what extent do academic-

centred criteria apply when evaluating cyberbullying? Are there alternative criteria that young adults perceive to be more important for determining and evaluating cyberbullying?

The third objective was to evaluate how cyberbullying has been handled by post-secondary institutions and investigate potential solutions young adults believe can be implemented at the post-secondary level to effectively prevent, respond to, and combat cyberbullying. These are important lines of inquiry because presently, post-secondary institutions have been critiqued as overlooking cyberbullying, and have sparse, if any, resources in place to help prevent and/or respond to cyberbullying (Faucher et al., 2020; Viall, 2021). To achieve the objectives, I focused on addressing the following research questions: From the perspectives of post-secondary students, what resources currently exist on campus that address cyberbullying? Do students perceive there to be any barriers impeding the implementation of cyberbullying resources on post-secondary campuses? If so, how do we overcome them? Taken together, through addressing these objectives, this research will help to advance the cyberbullying literature, which will help to lead to a more comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying.

1.4 Research significance

Corresponding to the three objectives of this work, three central contributions are made to the cyberbullying literature, which demonstrate this work's significance. First, this work offers a theoretical model specific to cyberbullying. What is unique about the social-ecological model of cyberbullying is that it incorporates digital-specific factors within each ecological system of the original EST model as well as adds the digital context as a separate ecological system, which also interconnects with the other systems. Thus, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying fully integrates the digital context, highlighting how the digital intertwines with the individual and societal contexts, often blurring the boundaries. Recognizing the interconnectedness of the digital context with other ecological systems will enhance our understanding of cyberbullying. As a result, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying will help to not only inform what cyberbullying is and entails, but also allows researchers to evaluate cyberbullying (i.e., its causes and contexts) more effectively and empirically. Second, by drawing from young adults' perspectives, this study contributes to the literature by not only expanding our knowledge of cyberbullying outside the K-12 school system, but also by working to resolve discrepancies between academic-centred evaluations of cyberbullying and young adults' perspectives. Gaining insights into young adults'

classifications and evaluations of cyberbullying helps to resolve debates regarding how we can distinguish cyberbullying from cyberbullying-like behaviours (see Cassidy et al., 2019; Marwick & boyd, 2014) and leads to a more informed understanding of what criteria young adults perceive are most appropriate when evaluating cyberbullying behaviours. Third, again by garnering the perspectives of post-secondary students, this work addresses a void in understanding post-secondary students' evaluations of how cyberbullying is handled at the post-secondary level (see Vaill, 2021; Vaill et al., 2021) as well as uncovers the perspectives and opinions of post-secondary students regarding potential barriers around these resources as well as how to overcome them.

1.5 Chapter outline

Taking the form of an integrated article format, each of the chapters of this dissertation (chapters two, four, and five) are intended as standalone articles, and correspond to the three objectives of this work. However, while not common for dissertations using an integrated article format, the methods are discussed in their own chapter. Given that chapter 2 is a theoretical piece, and does not utilize the methods of the study, the methods chapter follows. The reason for including the methods as their own chapter was to not only avoid repetition in chapters 4 and 5, but to discuss the methodological choices made in more detail, which are often not included in academic articles, yet were important considerations in the development of this dissertation.

In chapter 2, ahead of introducing the social-ecological model of cyberbullying, I have given an overview of Bronfenbrenner's EST (1979). I then discuss EST's applicability to bullying-related research by outlining Swearer's and Espelage's (2004) social-ecological model of bullying and the benefits and uses of this model by bullying scholars within the bullying literature. Given the model's success and void in theoretical model for cyberbullying-related research, I discuss the need for a similar model for cyberbullying. Thus, I present the social-ecological model of cyberbullying by outlining the digital context and digital-specific factors necessary to consider at each level and system within the new model. To conclude, I discuss the benefits and limitations of the proposed model and suggest areas for future research using the social-ecological model of cyberbullying.

Next, in chapter 3, I explain my methodology. Within this discussion, I provide details on the research plan, including the data collection and data analysis process. Here, I address any methodological challenges and how I overcame them. I also provide an overview

of the research instruments (e.g., interview guide) and explain decisions that were made during their creation. Finally, I end by giving an overview of the methodological limitations of this research.

In chapter 4, I begin by reviewing the cyberbullying literature to define and discuss how cyberbullying has been conceptualized by cyberbullying scholars along with the criteria used to distinguish cyberbullying from other forms of online interpersonal harm (e.g., drama; gossip; conflict). Drawing on cyberbullying research from a life course perspective, I also identify life course differences in how cyberbullying has been understood, illustrating how cyberbullying evolves and changes throughout the life stages of childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. Here, I problematize the lack of work examining cyberbullying from the perspectives of young adults. This has left unanswered questions regarding what criteria young adults use to classify cyberbullying behaviours and if these criteria resemble those outlined within the cyberbullying literature. Next, I discuss my findings, which begins with a discussion of young adults' perceptions of cyberbullying and the influences they draw upon that help inform and shape these perceptions as well as their evaluations of the academic-centred criteria used within the literature for characterizing cyberbullying. I demonstrate that according to young adults, not all these criteria are applicable, rather young adults identify and use four key dimensions when classifying cyberbullying behaviours and their levels of severity. Drawing from these findings, I highlight the importance of these dimensions and how they can help to inform broader conceptualizations of cyberbullying. I conclude by identifying the limitations of this work and offer suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5 begins with a review of the cyberbullying literature, specifically outlining cyberbullying initiatives developed and implemented at the post-secondary level. Here, it is highlighted that there has been a lack of investigation into cyberbullying prevention and response strategies targeting young adults at the post-secondary level. Despite a limited number of potential solutions for targeting cyberbullying occurring on post-secondary campuses put forth in recent research, there remains a lack of evidence on the perceived effectiveness of these initiatives from the perspectives of young adults. As well, there has been no evidence that investigates the potential underlying barriers that have inhibited the implementation of cyberbullying initiatives by post-secondary institutions, which could explain the lack of resources and prevention and response initiatives presently seen on post-secondary campuses. Next, I discuss my findings. The findings revealed a lack of resources

being offered by post-secondary institutions for preventing and responding to cyberbullying as well as several key barriers impacting the availability of cyberbullying resources on campus (e.g., lack of cyberbullying conversations occurring on campus; limited knowledge around the impacts of cyberbullying on young adults; a stigma associated with cybervictimization). To address these barriers, young adults discussed potential initiatives they perceived would be effective. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the benefits and policy implications of this work, the limitations of this study, and areas for future research.

The final chapter, chapter 6, highlights and summarizes key findings from my analysis and offers a series of conclusions. I draw attention to several key contributions of this research that can help to shape both cyberbullying research and society more generally. I return to the social-ecological model of cyberbullying to outline how using this approach is better suited to contextualize the nuances, recent developments, and unique aspects of cyberbullying. My discussion transitions to highlight the benefits of garnering young adults' perspectives regarding cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood and at the post-secondary level, which in the case of this research, has led to a better understanding of cyberbullying and cyberbullying-like behaviours from the perspectives of real participants. Finally, I consider the practical and theoretical implications of my findings, outline the limitations of this research, and offer directions for future research.

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2. Illuminating the cyberbullying blind spot: Introducing the social-ecological model of cyberbullying

2.1 Introduction

Parents, educators, and experts have identified cyberbullying as a prevalent and harmful phenomenon in the life of youth (PACER, 2022). Cyberbullying includes a range of harmful behaviors facilitated through digital media such as spreading rumours. Digital media are defined as the devices (e.g., cellphones and tablets) and applications (e.g., Snapchat and Instagram) used to access, produce, consume, and exchange information in digital form for supporting peer interactions, gaming, and self-presentation (Quan-Haase, Wang, Wellman, & Zhang, 2018). In Canada, one out of three youth aged 15 to 29 reported having been victims of cyberbullying (Statistics Canada, 2016), and in the US, the Pew Research Center reported that the prevalence was almost double (Anderson, 2018). Even more concerning, the prevalence of cyberbullying increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns of 2019 (L1ight, 2020), likely because youth spent more time online (Gordon, 2020). These statistics cannot be ignored because cyberbullying victimization can have serious and irreversible consequences such as increased anxiety, higher levels of depression, and suicide ideation (Mishna et al., 2018). With youth spending increased amounts of time online in a post-pandemic era (Perrin & Atske, 2021), understanding cyberbullying becomes a pressing social issue.

An extensive body of knowledge has accumulated after decades of research on offline bullying (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). This body of knowledge includes Swearer's and Espelage's (2004) influential social-ecological model, which identifies important factors affecting bullying within different social contexts. The model has provided a systematic understanding of bullying perpetration and victimization and has informed prevention and intervention initiatives (Hong et al., 2019). Yet, cyberbullying is not simply an extension of bullying, but rather a new and different phenomenon that requires the development of new concepts and theories (Sheanoda, Bussey, & Jones, 2021). This makes the study of cyberbullying challenging, as existing theories of offline bullying can provide a roadmap but cannot simply be applied to this novel phenomenon. A key problem is that bullying theories do not sufficiently take into consideration the digital context in which cyberbullying takes place (McMahon, 2014). Researchers such as Hinduja and Patchin (2018) have started studying the digital context, identifying unique characteristics that impact cyberbullying such

as anonymity, the perception that online spaces are free of rules, and the disinhibition effect, which describes how individuals feel a lack of restraint when online. Despite the relevance of this initial research, there continues to be a lack of systematic and coherent integration of cyberbullying specific findings across various social contexts (Tanrikulu, 2015). This necessitates the development of a theoretical model that brings existing research on cyberbullying together with the aim of consolidation.

The aim of the present paper is to develop the social-ecological model of cyberbullying by building on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) and Swearer's and Espelage's (2004) social-ecological model of bullying. While scholars have applied EST to cyberbullying research (e.g., Wright, 2016), this work is rather limited in scope, as studies have focused primarily on the individual level (i.e., where the individual is placed at the centre of their development and affected by their surroundings) and the microsystem (i.e., defined as the groups in which individuals interact such as parents, friends/peers, and educators). This narrow focus has been on the direct influence of parents, friends/peers, and educators on an individual's participation in cyberbullying (Price & Green, 2016). Despite EST's potential utility to further cyberbullying scholarship, it has not yet been systematically applied. A key strength of the proposed social-ecological model of cyberbullying is that it applies EST to integrate, compare, and organize the cyberbullying literature in a coherent way. This will incorporate digital-specific factors within each ecological system of the original EST model. A second strength is the addition of the digital context as a separate ecological system yet interconnected with the other systems. Thus, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying fully integrates the digital context, highlighting how the digital intertwines with the individual and societal contexts, often blurring the boundaries, which enhances our understanding of cyberbullying. A practical application of the model is that it can guide the creation and implementation of cyberbullying prevention and intervention initiatives. This is a critical outcome because studies have continuously demonstrated a need for more effective, age-appropriate cyberbullying-focused initiatives targeting groups at varying stages of the life course (Faucher, Cassidy, & Jackson, 2020).

The present paper starts by providing an overview of Bronfenbrenner's EST (1979), examining how it has evolved and demonstrating its application to bullying-related research. Next, the paper discusses Swearer's and Espelage's (2004) social-ecological model of bullying. The paper then proposes the social-ecological model of cyberbullying as a new

model that systematically addresses the role of digital media in cyberbullying and its interconnectedness within each ecological system. While cyberbullying affects individuals across the lifespan and in diverse social contexts such as school, work, and leisure (Myers & Cowie, 2019), the current focus centres on research based on youth because this age group is most vulnerable to cyberbullying, which can lead to serious, life-long repercussions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019). While youth is a broad and culturally defined life phase, this paper follows the United Nations (2020) age-based conceptualization and understands it to include children, adolescents, and young adults under the age of 25. Given variations in criteria applicable to cyberbullying depending one's stage in the life course, as not all criteria equally apply to each life stage (e.g., the influence of parents dwindles from childhood to young adulthood) (Galambos et al., 2018), when exemplifying the social-ecological model of cyberbullying, evidence is given specifically focusing on children and adolescents as they are identified to be most involved in cyberbullying (Anderson, 2018; Patchin & Hinduja, 2020). The paper concludes by discussing the strengths of the social-ecological model of cyberbullying and opportunities for testing, finetuning, and expanding the model.

2.2. Background

To provide the necessary context to develop the new model of cyberbullying, the paper begins with a brief overview of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) (1979) by discussing how it has evolved and highlighting key contributions (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). A strength of EST lies in its explanation of how an individual interacts and develops throughout the life course within varying social contexts such as the home, peer groups, and educational institutions (Corsaro, 1985). Most importantly, these contexts are not seen as silos, but rather the model suggests they overlap and interact with one another. EST refers to social contexts as ecological systems and sees these as places where individuals influence and are influenced by social relations and the broader culture (Swearer & Espelage, 2004).

EST has continued to evolve. During his career, Bronfenbrenner revisited the model, making several important modifications (see Eriksson et al., 2018). For instance, in the 1980s to mid-1990s, significant changes to the model included more emphasis on close, reciprocal face-to-face interactions within a child's immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and taking more fully into consideration the development of the chronosystem, accounting for changes over time and how these affect an individual's developmental

outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). From the mid-1990s to 2006, Bronfenbrenner (1995) developed concepts such as proximal processes, which constitute reciprocal interactions with other individuals, objects, and symbols that take place over time. Since its development, many studies have drawn on Bronfenbrenner's original EST and later developments to study a wide range of research questions. The next section examines how EST has been applied to bullying research and how it has provided important insights that have directly impacted bullying prevention and intervention.

2.2.1 The social-ecological model of bullying

Building on Bronfenbrenner's EST, Swearer and Espelage (2004) developed the social-ecological model of bullying. In this model, bullying results from a dynamic interplay between individuals and their social contexts. For example, school and family characteristics influence how a person experiences bullying (Espelage, 2014). Key characteristics found to have an impact are the type and amount of social support available in and out of school, the school's use of community partnerships and resources (Leff, Power, & Goldstein, 2004), and interactions taking place between parents and educators (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Taken together, these factors highlight the interplay between an individual's various environments (Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009), where congruency between them helps to mediate the occurrence and impacts of bullying behaviours (Swearer & Espelage, 2004).

The social-ecological model has advanced understandings of offline bullying because of its flexibility, allowing scholars to apply it to suit the needs of their research questions and methodological approaches. For example, Hong et al. (2019) required flexibility to assess the social structure of bully and victim social groups in South Korea by examining the presence and absence of several relationship variables (e.g., socio-demographic variables; maltreatment; quality of peer relationships; school activities; teacher relationships) within different social-ecological contexts (e.g., individual, family, friend/peer, and school variables). While some findings paralleled existing research, such as that individuals associated with peer groups where aggression was normalized were more likely to show aggressive behaviours (see Maunder & Crafter, 2018), Hong et al. (2019) were able to provide deeper insight into which variables and at what level helped to explain bullying while accounting for variance alongside other relevant variables. An additional benefit of using the social-ecological model in Hong et al.'s (2019) study was that it helped to tease out

and understand cultural differences in bullying behaviours in South Korea compared to what is known about bullying in Western cultures.

With evidence suggesting there to be insufficiencies in anti-bullying interventions and programs (see Hornby, 2016), it has been argued that a social-ecological approach can remedy these concerns because of its ability to address different ecological layers and target multiple risk factors (Bradshaw, 2015). In this way, a central benefit of the social-ecological model is the impact it can have on policy. For instance, unlike other models, using the social-ecological model can help to plan and organize comprehensive programs for bullying prevention (Espelage & Swearer, 2010) and develop targeted interventions at the level of individuals, teachers, schools, and communities (Hong et al., 2019). For example, in a study of middle school students, Shams et al. (2018) found that implementing educational programs within schools rooted in the social-ecological understanding of bullying, by having bullying education and intervention translate across the home and school contexts, helped reduce bullying behaviours. This is because by combining the influence of parents and educators, as well as equipping students with regular and adequate bullying knowledge and resources, participation in bullying could be reduced and the effects of bullying mitigated (Shams et al., 2018). However, with evidence finding that bullying interventions are less effective as children age (see Salmivalli et al., 2021), the social-ecological approach can offer insight into factors that distinguish older age groups (e.g., adolescents; young adults) from younger children, assess unique factors impacting youth's involvement in bullying, and better inform and develop more effective prevention initiatives that effectively and more appropriately target adolescents (see Merrin, Espelage, & Hong, 2018). Overall, the social-ecological model of bullying serves as a foundation for investigating and expanding our knowledge of social-ecological factors related to bullying as well as how to address bullying across and within varying contexts.

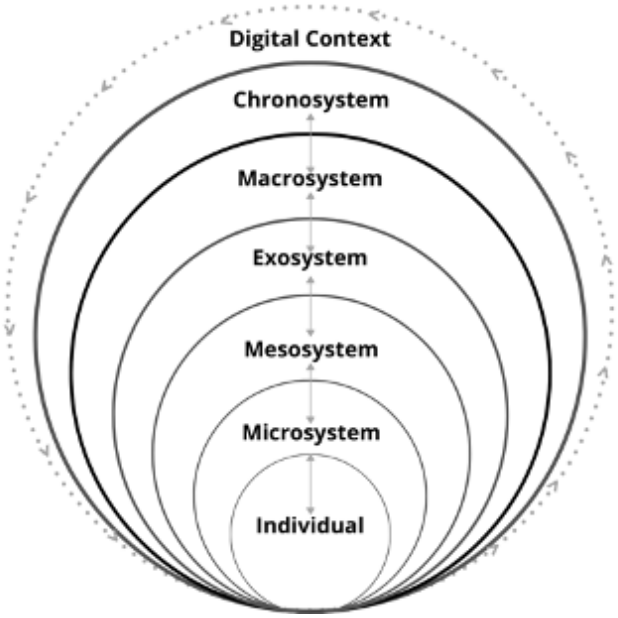
2.3 The social-ecological model of cyberbullying

Recognizing the value of the social-ecological model of bullying, scholars have started applying EST to the study of cyberbullying (e.g., Wright, 2016). The focus of this research has been primarily on the individual level and microsystem, with a few studies also addressing the mesosystem (i.e., the system examining the connection and (in)congruence between microsystem relationships). Illustrating how relationships in the microsystem affect youth's involvement in cyberbullying, Pendergrass and Wright (2016) found acts of

cyberbullying heavily involved one's peers. They found that peers perpetrated acts of cyberbullying and/or helped escalate the problem by spreading information across peer groups. Their work also highlights the importance of the overlap between peer and school contexts where peer relations extend beyond the classroom. This overlap is important because many cases of cyberbullying are perpetrated online before or after school, but the consequences permeate into the school environment.

Despite the potential of EST for informing cyberbullying research, it has not yet been systematically applied. This is because cyberbullying is a complex digital phenomenon and situating digital-specific factors within all the ecological systems is difficult. To fill this gap in the literature, this work builds on Bronfenbrenner's EST to examine the role of the digital context in cyberbullying to provide cyberbullying scholars with a multi-layered explanation of the occurrence of cyberbullying. The proposed model (see Figure 1)[3] addresses not only the longstanding "blind spot" of disregarding the digital context (McMahon, 2014), but it also helps to reveal the complex interactions among various factors and contexts that contribute to cyberbullying (Wright, 2016; see Table 1).

Figure 1. The social-ecological model of cyberbullying.



[3] It is important to note that within the social-ecological model of cyberbullying presented here, we consider digital-specific factors necessary for understanding cyberbullying. However, it ought to be understood that offline factors should not be omitted from cyberbullying investigations. For example, there are additional non-digital factors necessary to consider at the individual level (e.g., demographic factors, social and psychological variables) that contribute to explaining cyberbullying involvement (see Wright, 2016).

Table 1. Summary of factors within the social-ecological model of cyberbullying.

Individual	• Access to and use of digital media • Digital skill level • Digital management strategies • Digital education about and awareness of cyberbullying
Microsystem	• Parents/Family • Friends/peers • Educators
Mesosystem	• (In)congruence regarding attitudes toward and perceptions of digital media and cyberbullying between social groups
Exosystem	• Cyberbullying laws, policies, and resources • Digital privacy and security settings • Cyberbullying experiences of others
Macrosystem	• Cross-cultural views on cyberbullying • Smaller-scale cultural variations in conceptualizing cyberbullying • Social norms around cyberbullying
Chronosystem	• Changes in digital media and the extent of integration into the everyday lives of individuals • Life course transitions • Historical events and crises
Digital Context	• Types of digital media, features, and regulations • Social and informational affordances of digital media • Digital cultures and norms

2.3.1 Individual level

At the individual level, it is important to consider an individual's access to and use of digital media because these factors increase a youth's availability and accessibility, which in turn increases potential cyberbullying perpetration and victimization (Englander, 2019). Yet not all youth have the same degree of access (Livingstone, Mascheroni, & Stoilova, 2021). For example, UNICEF (2020) reports that worldwide, approximately two-thirds of young people aged 25 and under do not have Internet access at home. Even without regular access,

individuals can fall victims to cyberbullying (Rossow, 2018), and because of their irregular access, they cannot see what is posted online about them, yet they still experience the repercussions (e.g., offline consequences to online victimization) (Ferrara, Ianniello, Villani, & Corsello, 2018). In terms of digital skill, evidence suggests that youth with greater "cyber-confidence" (Shin & Ahn, 2015) and more sophisticated digital skills – whether sought out or innate – are more likely to participate in cyberbullying (Wang & Ngai, 2021). Utilizing digital media for more purposes (i.e., socializing; relieving boredom; entertainment) combined with increased or advanced digital skills (e.g., easily obtain information; curate content; utilize digital features and affordances), some youth may view digital spaces as providing opportunities for participating in mean behaviours, thereby leading to cyberbullying perpetration (Rodriguez-de-Dios, Oosten, & Igartua, 2018). In some cases, these youth may justify their actions, dismissing them as routine or even acceptable practices given that it is hard to contextualize different forms of online conflict (e.g., drama; banter; humour; sarcasm) (Steer et al., 2020). Taken together, one's access to and use of digital media, including one's digital skills, contribute to both cyberbullying involvement and potential victimization.

Another important factor is a person's digital management strategies such as the ability to disconnect (Price & Green, 2016) and the balance between time spent online and offline (Den Hamer & Konijn, 2016). Findings suggest that as individuals spend more time online, the opportunities to perpetrate and/or experience cyberbullying increase (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2015). This suggests that digital management strategies can be a mitigating factor for reducing exposure to cyberbullying (Brooks & Lasser, 2018). Yet, measuring digital management strategies can be challenging, as no single approach yet exists.

Education about cyberbullying is also an individual level factor that can influence cyberbullying involvement (Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2019). This is because learning how to responsibly use digital technologies can mitigate problematic online behaviours (Kaluarachchi, Warren, & Jiang, 2020). By acknowledging and being aware that cyberbullying is a real and serious concern – and a potential risk that is posed when engaging online – youth can protect themselves from being targeted by as well as restrict opportunities for engaging in cyberbullying (Graber, 2019). For example, learning at school about the personal, social, and potentially legal consequences associated with cyberbullying, individuals may be deterred from perpetrating and/or participating in cyberbullying (Cross et

al., 2015). By being informed about cyberbullying, individuals can feel more empowered, become active bystanders, and/or report cyberbullying (Vlaanderen, Bevelander, & Kleemans, 2020). However, as Salmivalli et al. (2021) suggest, these types of initiatives tend to be less effective for adolescents compared to younger children, indicating that this education needs to happen at younger ages to have long-term effects and/or that initiatives need to be revamped to better target adolescents.

2.3.2 Microsystem

The microsystem encompasses an individual's immediate social network including parents, friends/peers, and educators (Price & Green, 2016) as well as their attitudes toward cyberbullying (Wright, 2016). Parents constitute a key component of the microsystem, especially in childhood and early adolescence. This is because parents teach their children about digital media, including topics such as privacy, overuse, and potential risks like cyberbullying (Graber, 2019). Through ongoing conversations with parents, youth can better recognize cyberbullying, what to do when it happens (i.e., seek support, save the evidence) (Savage, Deiss, Roberto, & Aboujaoude, 2017), and learn empathy and empowerment, which help minimize the effects of cyberbullying (Helfrich et al., 2020). Empathy learned from parents in childhood and reinforced throughout the life course (e.g., via educators and with friends/peers) can deter youth from engaging in cyberbullying in the first place and teach them to show compassion when they see others being cyberbullied (Young & Tully, 2019). Empowerment can build youth's confidence, which helps to mitigate the consequences associated with cyberbullying victimization (Helfrich et al., 2020). This research shows that parents, especially in childhood, can play an active role in moderating the effects of cyberbullying by discussing strategies for how to prevent and respond to it (Hinduja & Patchin, 2022).

Friends/peers are just as influential as parents, and as youth become more independent, their influence grows (Sasson & Mesch, 2016). The effect of friends/peers occurs through normative social influence, which describes how individuals conform to group norms in a desire to fit in with and be liked by others (Schultz et al., 2006). For example, individuals adjust their online engagement based on what their friends/peers tell them about their own digital media use (e.g., choice of platforms and applications used), and group norms toward online behaviours (Marwick & boyd, 2014), including cyberbullying (Pendergrass & Wright, 2016). Cross et al. (2015) found that youth with close friends who

engage in or approve of cyberbullying are more likely to perceive cyberbullying as acceptable. This shows how attitudes and behaviors of friends/peers can influence an individual's attitudes toward and involvement in cyberbullying (Sasson & Mesch, 2016).

Even though cyberbullying often occurs outside of the classroom (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006), educators play a pivotal role in providing students with knowledge regarding online safety, digital risks, and (mis)use of digital media (Baldry, Farrington, Blaya, & Sorrentino, 2018) as well as cyberbullying-specific information like how to recognize cyberbullying, what to do if they are being cyberbullied (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012), and how to intervene as a cyber bystander (Migliore, 2003). How educators discuss and respond to cyberbullying impacts students' perceptions. For example, evidence has found that when educators take cyberbullying seriously, students better recognize the severity of cyberbullying, which signals to them that cyberbullying is unacceptable (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). In cases where students knew that an educator considered cyberbullying unacceptable, they were more likely to report instances to the educator (Cassidy et al., 2013). Thus, educators are critical in promoting cyberbullying education, prevention, and response.

2.3.3 Mesosystem

The mesosystem describes how microsystem groups interact with one another and can work together. An important area of investigation is to establish the extent of congruence between microsystem groups and how this can impact cyberbullying. For instance, if peers condone aggressive online behaviours, individuals are more likely to engage in them (Price & Green, 2016). However, with early intervention from parents and/or educators through education, communication, and discouragement, the hope would be that these influences and instilled values (i.e., empathy; empowerment) (Helfrich et al., 2020) could prevent participation in cyberbullying because individuals are more aware of the consequences of their actions (Park et al., 2021), subsequently making good, informed choices when faced with pressure from their peers (Espelage & Holt, 2001). When there are differences in attitudes toward cyberbullying across the different microsystem groups; however, it can result in confusion and inconsistencies in how individuals interpret, understand, and perceive cyberbullying (Wright, 2016). For example, research found that youth have very directed and specific uses of the term cyberbullying (Marwick & boyd, 2014) compared to adults (e.g., parents, educators) who use the term broadly (Crosslin & Golman, 2014; Espelage & Hong, 2017). These differences matter because they make identifying instances of cyberbullying more

complex and jeopardize effective prevention and intervention. Therefore, a comprehensive base definition of cyberbullying is needed – a challenge that has been longstanding within the cyberbullying literature (Alipan, Skues, Theiler, & Wise, 2019) – that informs microsystem groups about cyberbullying who subsequently influence individuals, resulting in youth to make assessments regarding the information that they receive about cyberbullying in hopes that doing so promotes positive online interactions and behaviours to ultimately mitigate cyberbullying.

2.3.4 Exosystem

While cyberbullying research on the exosystem remains sparse (Wright, 2016), it is important to assess existing laws, policies, and resources related to cyberbullying. These are found in the exosystem because youth do not participate in the creation process (Milosevic, 2017). By considering cyberbullying laws, policies, and resources, insights are gained into their enforcement, which reminds individuals that, contrary to what some may believe (i.e., lacking accountability online), there are consequences to being a perpetrator (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019). A first step would be to examine what resources are available for different social groups and evaluate their effectiveness. A key part of the evaluation would be to talk to youth and learn how well they understand the resources and what impact they have on addressing cyberbullying. There is also a need to examine how schools, parents, and institutions teach and enforce these policies (Price & Green, 2016).

Privacy and security settings of social media platforms are also part of the exosystem (Gorzig & Machackova, 2016). These settings provide users with agency because they can block or report another user if they experience cyberbullying (Hudson, Lambe, Pepler, & Craig, 2015). However, navigating these settings can be complicated and confusing, causing them to be ill-effective or underutilized, which could increase vulnerability to experiencing cyberbullying (Anderson, 2020). Thus, it is important to evaluate awareness and use of these features by youth and to implement educational resources to increase their effectiveness.

Cyberbullying experiences of others (i.e., a cyberbullied friend; cyber victim in mediated portrayals like news reports or popular film), can indirectly influence attitudes toward cyberbullying (Gorzig & Machackova, 2016). These experiences are in the exosystem because individuals themselves were not involved (otherwise they would be considered at the individual level), yet such experiences can “frame” perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying. Framing refers to how certain topics, events, or phenomena are presented to

an audience, which can influence individuals' perceptions (Goffman, 1974). For example, a highly publicized Canadian case—the cyberbullying of teenager Amanda Todd who took her life as a result—framed conversations around and impacted individuals' perceptions of cyberbullying (Sklar, 2012).

2.3.5 Macrosystem

The macrosystem first focuses on cross-cultural views of cyberbullying, such as what cyberbullying entails, how it is defined, and what is acceptable online (Marczak & Coyne, 2016; Price & Green, 2016). Variations across cultures can lead to varying prevalence rates and differing conceptualizations of the phenomenon (Wright, 2016). For example, in a study comparing youth's evaluations of cyberbullying among Iranian, Canadian, and Chinese adolescents, Mojdehi et al. (2019) found more positive attitudes toward cyberbullying among Iranian youth. Being attuned to cultural differences is important given that cyberbullying removes geographical boundaries (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). However, there is a need for more macrolevel research as few studies exist examining cultural differences (Bayraktar, 2016). Expanding cross-cultural understandings of cyberbullying can uncover variations across contexts, leading to a more informed perspective of what cyberbullying is, its frequency, and how to collectively combat serious outcomes for cyber victims (Muneer & Fati, 2020). While broader strategies targeting cyberbullying may not necessarily need to drastically differ across cultures (see Shapka, Onditi, Collie, & Lapidot-Lefler, 2018), being attune to cultural variations can better tailor cyberbullying initiatives (e.g., attuned to moral differences and cultural attitudes such as individualism and tolerance) (Mojdehi, Leduc, Mojdehi, & Talwar, 2019).

Smaller-scale cultural variations (e.g., adult culture and youth culture; racial/ethnic differences; socio-economic differences) also need to be investigated because these impact how groups understand cyberbullying (Crosslin & Golman, 2014). For instance, looking at differences across generations and cohorts, given how digital media drastically changed what bullying looks like, parents who may not have grown up with social media face potential challenges understanding such nuanced differences (Espelage & Hong, 2017) and their varying levels of impact (Cassidy et al., 2012). From parents' perspectives, their lack of understanding of cyberbullying is attributed to insufficient opportunities to stay updated on digital media, the impacts of cyberbullying on their children, and how they can take active roles to prevent and intervene in cyberbullying (Midamba & Moreno, 2019). Further, there is

a necessity to consider racial/ethnic and/or socio-economic differences when attempting to understand cyberbullying as different factors influence cyberbullying involvement (see Edwards, Kontostathis, & Fisher, 2016). For example, Xu et al. (2020) found that racial and ethnic minorities were disproportionately affected by contextual-level factors associated with bullying (e.g., adverse home and school environments), yet these individuals may be protected against bullying involvement and outcomes due to strong ethnic identity, positive cultural and family values, and other resilience factors. Therefore, to develop a more informed understanding of cyberbullying, smaller-scale cultural variations ought to be considered as doing so can reveal potential variations in the phenomenon as well as impact the development of better targeted cyberbullying prevention and response strategies.

Third, the macrosystem examines changing social norms around perceptions of cyberbullying, including how to best handle it as a social and potentially legal issue. This is because depending how cyberbullying is handled, it can influence the perceived level of severity of cyberbullying as well as its treatment within society (Coburn, Connolly, & Roesch, 2019). Looking at how cyberbullying is handled by institutions (i.e., schools), evidence shows that zero-tolerance policies are ill-effective (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019). Instead, for younger age groups (e.g., children and early adolescence) holistic measures including individuals, educators, parents, and community members (e.g., psychologists; police) are more appropriate (Schell, 2016) whereas for older age groups (e.g., older adolescence; early young adults), cyberbullying initiatives are needed that are better tailored to targeting individual and group level factors (Salmivalli et al., 2021). When such policies are in place, and translate across contexts, it helps ensure congruency – on a macro-level, individuals from all facets of society are consuming similar types of information, helping to form a common understanding of cyberbullying (Wright, 2016). However, a critical component is recognizing that as digital media change and evolve, so too does cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011), meaning these policies need to also continually be updated to stay relevant (Marczak & Coyne, 2016).

2.3.6 Chronosystem

The chronosystem considers time-related factors that affect cyberbullying. First, the chronosystem looks at how digital media have evolved and their integration into the lives of individuals (Wright, 2016). Corresponding to such shifts, it is necessary to identify changing and differing social norms around digital media use and how these can impact and inform

attitudes toward cyberbullying (Bayraktar, 2016). For example, following the proliferation of the Internet has come the introduction of more types of digital devices (i.e., smartphones, tablets) and a host of new applications and platforms (i.e., social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), all of which have become fundamental to the lives of individuals who are online for an array of purposes (Balbi & Magaudda, 2018). During this time, social media gained immense popularity for supporting social interactions, enabling engagement within online communities, and shifting the way individuals communicate (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Therefore, taking into consideration digital-specific changes over time, reflecting on the ways individuals are using and interacting within online spaces, and how online interactions can lead to the facilitation of problematic social behaviours, we are able to better understand cyberbullying.

Second, life course transitions can affect cyberbullying (e.g., cyberbullying engagement; perceptions around cyberbullying) (Cross et al., 2015; Crosslin & Golman, 2014). For example, in childhood and early adolescence, cyberbullying generally manifests through behaviours like mean messages, social exclusion, or having private information revealed whereas as individuals get older, such as in later teenage years or early young adulthood, cyberbullying manifests itself differently, taking place in the form of sexting, public shaming, or harassment (Myers & Cowie, 2019). As cyberbullying behaviours change, evolve, and escalate, the consequences associated with these behaviours can be potentially even more serious and damaging (see Cowie & Myers, 2018). Despite such changes, evidence demonstrates that cyberbullying remains problematic throughout the life course, and interventions are needed across varying life stages to effectively address it (Souza, Simao, Ferreira, & Ferreira, 2018).

Third, historical events and crises (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) have changed cyberbullying. For example, due to public health regulations during the pandemic (e.g., social distancing), youth used digital technologies for more types of activities (i.e., socializing; learning) (De, Pandey, & Pal, 2020). With this shift came the potential for more exposure to and participation in cyberbullying (Jain, Gupta, Satam, & Panda, 2020). For example, Rideout et al. (2021) found that one in four youth experienced cyberbullying via online comments on social media platforms during the pandemic. While evidence suggests social support from one's microsystem relationships help mitigate cyberbullying outcomes (Hellfeldt, Lopez-Romero, & Andershed, 2020), and that social support is vital during times

of stress and uncertainty (Wang & Eccles, 2012), availability of support may have been compromised during the pandemic due to limited in-person interactions (Rogers, Ha, & Ockey, 2021). As a result, cyberbullying victims faced potentially more serious outcomes, like severe depression (Michael & Reyes, 2021) and loneliness (Han, Wang, & Li, 2021). Thus, considering how historical events and crises impact cyberbullying illuminates changes in the phenomenon.

2.3.7 Digital context

As shown in Figure 1, the digital context is an additional, outer layer of the social-ecological model of cyberbullying. In this digital context, the first set of factors to consider are the types of digital media used and the features of them (i.e., portability; capabilities; design) (Gorzig & Machackova, 2016; Price & Green, 2016). Since digital devices enable connectivity from virtually anywhere, the boundaries of where and when cyberbullying can take place have broken down (Festl et al., 2013). For example, the development of easily transportable mobile phones, rise in high-speed Internet, affordability of data plans, and services like unlimited texting, expanded the range of facilities available, subsequently increasing opportunities for engaging in, being targeted by, and viewing cyberbullying (Sathyanarayana, Bansal, & Chandran, 2018).

Second, the digital context situates unique aspects of digital media that help facilitate cyberbullying (Chan et al., 2019), which can be linked to boyd's (2010, 2014) characteristics of technology, including persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability. Digital media are persistent by design (boyd, 2010), never truly shutting off (Ito et al., 2010), which breaks down boundaries of space and time (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). This means that unlike offline bullying, even when digital devices are turned off and platforms are signed out of, cyberbullying can still occur (Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013). This heightens vulnerability and the potential harms accompanying cyberbullying (Rice et al., 2015), namely because online content is "durable," permanent, and accessible on-demand (boyd, 2010). As a result, cyberbullying may never truly go away and/or snowball to be even more impactful (Reio & Ledesma Ortega, 2016).

Related to persistence is visibility. With social life converging online, our lives have become more public, allowing wider audiences access to more information much more quickly and easily (Baym & boyd, 2012). If privacy protection strategies are not used, this visibility is wider and private information could be exposed (Carrier, 2018), further

increasing opportunities for cyberbullying (Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2019). Increased visibility also helps magnify social conflicts, allowing audiences to not only see, but participate in the conflict (boyd, 2014), which could also increase cyberbullying occurrences (Koutamanis et al., 2015).

Visibility is enhanced by spreadability where online, audience members can see, engage with, and contribute to (e.g., commenting; liking) online content (boyd, 2014). The concern is that sharing online content increases the chances for information to spiral out of control (i.e., starting rumours) (Baym & boyd, 2012), which could lead to facilitating or worsening cyberbullying (Burgess-Proctor, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2010). This is especially true when content goes viral, rapidly infiltrating a wider number of social networks, creating an impression of the targeted individual, such as embarrassing or shaming them, which can impact their reputation online and offline (Rosewarne, 2016). Thus, even though individuals may be sharing content they find interesting or as a form of social currency (boyd, 2014), it has the potential to lead to and/or worsen cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2014).

Reinforcing the permanence of online content, information can easily be retrieved long after it was posted with a simple search (Burns, 2017). Due to this searchability, there is an increased possibility for rumours to flourish, which can subsequently lead to and/or escalate cyberbullying (Ito et al., 2010). This could have longstanding impacts on one's reputation (Bridges, 2019; Felmlee & Faris, 2014).

In addition to those boyd discussed, another prominent aspect to consider is the ability to conceal one's identity online (i.e., anonymity; aliases; fake accounts) (Deschamps & McNutt, 2016). Doing so, cyberbullies can perpetrate cyberbullying – both by initiating and going along with the cyberbullying – without cyber victims knowing who they are (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018), which may make cyberbullies more compelled to disclose personal or private information about their target(s), namely because they think that their actions have no repercussions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). This gives cyberbullies an immense amount of power (Rafferty & Vander Ven, 2014) and reduces empathy since cyberbullies cannot necessarily see the harm caused, further removing them from their actions (Rosewarne, 2016). Thus, cyberbullies protect themselves while inflicting harm onto others. It is important to note that differences between those initiating cyberbullying and those going along with the cyberbullying (e.g., bystanders who participate by spreading content or who do not intervene) as while the impact on the cyber victim(s) may be the same,

there may be differences in how to address different types of cyberbullies pending how and in what ways they involve themselves in the cyberbullying (Song & Oh, 2018).

Finally, the digital context also includes the online disinhibition effect, which results from the removal of physicality in digital spaces, empowering individuals to do/say things online that they would not normally do/say in-person (Suler, 2004). Online disinhibition is enabled online because individuals are removed from the influence of in-person authority figures (e.g., adults; friends/peers), which may cause cyberbullies to push the boundaries of acceptability because there are no rules, influences, or cues telling them otherwise (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019). This signals how moral values that regulate offline behaviour become fragile online as digital media and digital-specific factors disrupt and interrupt offline processes like social norm construction and the upholding of them (Chen, Chen, Lo, & Yang, 2008), which causes digital users to overlook moral standards, resulting in engaging in behaviours like cyberbullying (Udris, 2017). Thus, online disinhibition helps facilitate cyberbullying because digital media change the nature of interactions, making certain behaviours unacceptable offline perceived to be accepted online (Wright & Wachs, 2018). Overall, by taking the digital context into consideration, there is a better understanding of the unique aspects of digital media that help facilitate cyberbullying, and the ways cyberbullying has evolved and expanded with and alongside digital media.

2.4 Discussion

The present paper develops a model of cyberbullying based on the existing literature that incorporates digital-specific factors within each system of the original EST model and adds the digital context as its own ecological system—as a new layer in the model. While the model is based on Bronfenbrenner's EST, it expands it to reflect the digital. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) placed more weight on close, reciprocal face-to-face interactions within a youth's immediate environment. While these interactions with parents and caregivers are still considered critical for cyberbullying education and awareness, the model also stresses the relevance of weak, nonreciprocal digital interactions. This is because cyberbullying perpetrators are often unknown to youth and interactions take place via digital media. It thereby expands and updates the model to take into consideration that digital media are an integral part of a youth's everyday life. The model builds on the central assumption that online and offline spheres are no longer separate but rather overlap. Furthermore, we build on Bronfenbrenner's refinement of the chronosystem. Here, we include specifical historical

events and crises that can affect the amount of time youth are online and balance between time spent online and offline. Thus, unlike other models that tend to focus on a subset of variables and/or omit the interconnectedness of the digital context with other individual, familial, and societal contexts (see McMahon, 2014; Tanrikulu, 2015), the social ecological model of cyberbullying brings these together to allow for a more comprehensive examination of cyberbullying.

The model is a first step toward consolidation of the vast literature on cyberbullying and there is much opportunity for testing, finetuning, and expanding the model. First, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying affords great flexibility, allowing cyberbullying scholars to test the model in ways tailored to their research questions or methodologies. For example, scholars can evaluate a specific context such as investigating the digital context or investigate the model in its entirety to focus on a specific aspect of cyberbullying such as a particular social role. Second, cyberbullying scholars can work to finetune the model as new digital media emerge, and cyberbullying evolves and changes. For example, finetuning is necessary with the emergence and growing use of the social media platform TikTok (Zhang & Quan-Haase, 2022), which has distinct uses and gratifications (Shao & Lee, 2020). A study by Na (2020) suggests that the unique features of TikTok (e.g., enhanced interaction between creators and commenters; duet and reaction features; live video streaming) lead to higher rates of cyberbullying. By looking at the broader digital context and the ways digital media interconnect with other ecological systems, the model does not risk becoming outdated as digital media evolve. Instead, new digital media, such as TikTok, can be investigated using the model to finetune various components such as the relation between features of platforms and cyberbullying risks. Finally, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying can be expanded to other life phases, such as young adulthood, and contexts. It can also guide studies of toxic online behaviours related to or under the umbrella of cyberbullying including online harassment, sexting, and trolling.

Since the social-ecological model of cyberbullying builds on and expands EST, it shares similar limitations. Like EST, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying takes into consideration a multiplicity of factors within each ecological system, which makes it unfeasible to examine all factors in a single study (see Harper, Steiner, & Brookmeyer, 2018 as examples of the benefits of going through the trouble of including more predictors). This means that scholars need to make decisions as to what factors, contexts, and ecological

systems they will include in a single study. In addition, some factors are easier to operationalize and measure than others (e.g., empathy; digital literacy), which may impact what factors researchers choose to examine (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015).

Like the social-ecological model of bullying (see Swearer & Espelage, 2004), the social-ecological model of cyberbullying can guide effective and well-developed cyberbullying prevention, intervention, and educational programs. While current initiatives have successfully increased cyberbullying education and awareness (e.g., what cyberbullying is; how to respond to cybervictimization) (see Heyeres et al., 2021), very few initiatives have focused on addressing cyberbullying more holistically (e.g., consequences of the online/offline overlap) (Gaffney, Farrington, Espelage, & Ttofi, 2019). By providing theoretical clarity regarding cyberbullying (e.g., differentiating cyberbullying from offline bullying) (Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Del Rey, 2015), the model can remedy these oversights given its central focus is on the interconnectedness of the social and digital contexts. As a result, cyberbullying initiatives can be better tailored to changing environments (e.g., digital spaces; social media platforms) as well as the offline/online overlap (Pichel et al., 2021). For example, through a social-ecological understanding of cyberbullying, individuals, adults (e.g., parents and educators), and other societal members (e.g., police; counsellors; digital platforms) can better understand and respond to the causes and consequences of cyberbullying, enhance support services, and implement more tailored training programs and policies (UNESCO, 2020). Further, focusing specifically on adolescence, for example, unlike more simplistic models, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying has the potential to reveal a multitude of factors across ecological systems specific to youth, perhaps differentiating them from younger age groups (e.g., children) (see Salmivalli et al., 2021), which has the potential to lead to more informed cyberbullying prevention and response initiatives. This is because other models have not adequately or sufficiently been able to capture a multitude of factors relating to youth and their online behaviours to effectively mitigate cyberbullying. As the digital context remains prominent in a post-COVID-19 era (Gordon, 2020), such initiatives are necessary as they target a multitude of dimensions – or ecological systems – related to cyberbullying.

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3. Methods

3.1 Introduction

The goal of this qualitative study was to provide an analysis of the narratives of second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduate students enrolled at a large southwestern Ontario university to better understand their perspectives on cyberbullying at the post-secondary level. While we know cyberbullying remains a prominent and concerning issue throughout the life course (see Myers & Cowie, 2019), cyberbullying scholars disproportionately research children and adolescents within the K-12 school system, leaving a gap in our understanding of young adults' points of view regarding how they perceive and understand cyberbullying (see Myers & Cowie, 2019; Sheanoda, Bussey, & Jones, 2021). Therefore, the current study sought to extend investigations of cyberbullying at the post-secondary level by garnering the perspectives of post-secondary students, allowing them to, in their own words, conceptualize and evaluate cyberbullying, assess the treatment of cyberbullying by post-secondary institutions, and derive potential solutions for preventing and responding to cyberbullying occurring on post-secondary campuses. This chapter provides a detailed description of the research plan including the research questions, design of the study, study participants, research instruments, data collection and analysis procedures, as well as methodological challenges and limitations. It ends by considering my role as the researcher through a discussion of reflexivity and positionality.

3.2 Research design

3.2.1 Research questions and study design

Knowing the negative impacts cyber victimization can have on targeted individuals, it is problematic that we know little about how young adults perceive and evaluate cyberbullying (Sheanoda et al., 2021), or about their views on techniques and strategies that could be implemented by post-secondary institutions to prevent and respond to cyberbullying (Faucher, Cassidy, & Jackson, 2020; Vaill, 2021). The current research aimed to remedy these gaps by addressing the following research questions:

- What points of reference do young adults draw upon to describe and discuss cyberbullying?

- According to young adults, to what extent do academic-centred criteria apply when evaluating cyberbullying? Are there alternative criteria that young adults perceive to be more important for determining and evaluating cyberbullying?
- From the perspectives of post-secondary students, what resources currently exist on campus that address cyberbullying?
- Do students perceive there to be any barriers impeding the implementation of cyberbullying resources on post-secondary campuses? If so, how do we overcome them?

To address the research questions, undergraduate students were interviewed about their perceptions of cyberbullying occurring at the post-secondary level, particularly how they perceive and evaluate cyberbullying, as well as the treatment of and responses to cyberbullying. This qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for a more detailed and in-depth investigation into the phenomenon of focus with the focal age group (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Stake, 2010). By conducting interviews, much needed spaces are created for young adults to give a voice to their own interpretations, thoughts, and perspectives on the topic of cyberbullying rather than relying on adults' (i.e., parents; educators) interpretations of their lives and/or experiences (Eder & Fingerson, 2001; O'Brien, 2019; Warren, 2001). Below is a more detailed discussion of the design of this study including the participant selection process and the research instruments.

3.2.2 Participant selection

To capture a range of perspectives, I used purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique (Blackstone, 2012; Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Using purposive sampling, participants were selected based on certain criteria or characteristics (Mack et al., 2005; Palinkas et al., 2015; Silverman, 2001), which included being (a) a second-, third-or fourth-year undergraduate student attending Western University or an affiliated college (Kings, Brescia, Huron), (b) an English speaker, and (c) between the ages of 18 and 25.

These criteria were chosen for several reasons. First, since COVID-19 had changed the incoming first-year student experience, with courses and university life occurring exclusively online, upper-year undergraduate students could reflect on their transition to post-secondary when they were first-year students and the changes they experienced from year to year. Second, individuals in the targeted age group are among the most active on

social media platforms (between 15 and 30) (Canadian Internet Registration Authority, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2018). Third, perhaps due to increased time online, individuals in this age range are reported to be most involved in cyberbullying (Statistics Canada, 2016). Fourth, while there has been some fruitful research drawing on undergraduate student samples to investigate cyberbullying (see Cassidy et al., 2019; Mishna et al., 2018), research using post-secondary student participants remains sparse. More specifically, we remain without a fully realized picture of what cyberbullying means from the perspectives of those outside the K-12 school system (Myers & Cowie, 2017; Rafferty & Vander Ven, 2014; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014). Fifth, unlike children and adolescents, young adults can better discuss complex issues in their lives and make deeper connections and judgments about themselves and their lives in relation to others, particularly regarding their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences both on- and off-line (Eliason, Mortimer, & Vuolo, 2015). This suggests they can give insight into the many aspects of their digital worlds, generating discussion about online practices and the meaning of these practices, the intricacies of their social relationships, and the nuanced differences of what distinguishes cyberbullying from cyberbullying-like behaviours (e.g., digital forms of drama; peer aggression).

Since the aim of this research was to garner a variety of perspectives to help inform perceptions of cyberbullying, the decision was made to not limit the sample based on the experience of cyberbullying. Rather, the interview guide included space that allowed students to reflect on and disclose their own experience of cyberbullying if they wanted to. Further, to garner a diverse set of perspectives, sampling criteria were not limited by use of digital media (e.g., heavy, frequent users, non-users).[4] This is because it is likely that most young adults own or have access to digital devices and/or have at least one social media account. Even for those who do not, they can still help to inform our knowledge and understanding of cyberbullying based on their attitudes toward technology, social media, and cyberbullying.

[4] It should be noted that despite not limiting the sampling criteria by digital media use, all participants in this study were active digital users, utilizing a variety of digital media and social media platforms. More details on participants digital media use and digital skill level can be found in the section 3.3 entitled "Sample." Thus, the findings of this study largely reflect the perspectives of young adults who are active digital users despite degrees in their level of digital activity and purposes of such use. Therefore, the perspectives of young adults who are not digital users or who are minimally active are not represented in this study.

3.2.3 Instruments

3.2.3.1 Pre-interview questionnaire

Before participating in a semi-structured interview, participants were asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire (for a full list of questions asked, see Appendix A). Including a pre-interview questionnaire allowed for a more contextualized understanding of the interview data without disrupting the interview, which helped keep the interviews concise. The aim of the questionnaire was not to gather quantitative data, as the sample size was too small for meaningful statistical results, but rather to obtain a better understanding of participant demographics and their use of digital media, including social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok). For example, evidence tells us that individuals who spend more time online – especially if they engage in risky online behaviours (Choi, Cho, & Lee, 2019) – have heightened chances of witnessing and/or being targeted by cyberbullying (Anderson, 2018; Holt et al., 2016; Nasi, Rasanen, Kaakinen, Keipi, & Oksanen, 2017). Thus, knowing what types of platforms participants were using, the length of time they spend online, and the types of activities they engage in helped to tease out additional layers of the responses given during the interviews.

The pre-interview questionnaire for this study was designed and conducted through Qualtrics; an online survey software approved by the Research Ethics Board. The questionnaire was brief, designed to be completed in 15 minutes or less. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire at their leisure, but before the interview. All participants completed the questionnaire in its entirety, resulting in no missing data in the final sample.

3.2.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

When conducting qualitative interviews, researchers must make choices around which interview format meets the needs of the questions they seek to address. For example, unstructured interviews allow for a free-flowing conversation between researcher and participant without any parameters for the topic or depth of the conversation (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Mueller & Segal, 2015). Structured interviews, on the other hand, follow a standardized list of questions, including follow-up questions that are uniformly asked of each participant (Mueller & Segal, 2015). There are also in-depth interviews, which use open and direct verbal questions to elicit stories and case-orientated narratives, with the larger goal of seeking to maximize richness of the information obtained and focus on depth, detail, and nuance (Miller & Crabtree, 2004). For this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews, a

type of structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are used when we have a broader understanding of an experience or phenomenon, but subjective knowledge is lacking (Morse & Field, 1995; Richards & Morse, 2007). In the context of this study, while we know cyberbullying occurs in young adulthood, we are less knowledgeable about cyberbullying (i.e., conceptualizations; definitions; criteria used to evaluate it) from the perspectives of post-secondary students. Thus, an advantage of using the semi-structured format is the ability for the researcher to garner a wide range of perspectives (Morse & Field, 1995).

When conducting semi-structured interviews, researchers ask participants a series of pre-determined, open-ended questions (Ayres, 2008; Flewitt, 2014; Smith, 1995; Whiting, 2008). By having a uniform set of questions, the central questions guiding the interview are given equal importance across all participants (Denzin, 1989). However, unlike a fully structured interview, researchers have flexibility to probe participants and ask follow-up questions relating to the concepts under investigation (Ayres, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Thus, a major benefit of semi-structured interviews is the ability to modify the types of follow-up questions being asked depending on participants' responses (Ayres, 2008; Bartholomew, Henderson, & Marcia, 2000; Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013). Given that all participants in this study were asked the same questions, data are comparable (McIntosh & Morse, 2015), allowing the researcher to collect particular types of information to generate themes and narratives around the focal topic (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010; Miller & Crabtree, 2004). Such outcomes are less available in other types of interviews, like unstructured interviews, since interviewers have less control over participants' responses (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Another benefit of semi-structured interviews is that they encourage the interweaving of looking and listening, allowing researchers to engage in participant observation, noting verbal and non-verbal cues and their potential meanings (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2005).

Semi-structured interviews were a good fit for this research because I was able to guide participants through a core set of questions to better understand their perceptions of cyberbullying, criteria used to evaluate it, characteristics influencing their perceptions of it, and what factors were considered when discussing cyberbullying, as well as addressing additional points of consideration as they arose. Unlike other types of interviews, participants had the opportunity to voice to their interpretations, thoughts, and perspectives without being so free-range that meaningful comparisons across interviews could not be made, or too

structured that there would be no room for variation within and between responses. Capturing such variations was important because cyberbullying is a subjective phenomenon (see Connell, Schell-Busey, & Hernandez, 2019; Hamburger, Basile, & Vivolo, 2011). Therefore, via semi-structured interviews, I could gather enough data to sufficiently address my guiding research questions while also remaining open to additional narratives, and having the freedom to probe and ask follow-up questions to delve deeper into participants' responses.

The interview guide was organized using a funneling technique, which involves moving from more general, rapport-building questions to more specific questions, with more attention paid to the later portion around the primary topics of focus (Hermanowicz, 2002; Smith, 1995). As a result, I began each interview introducing myself and the nature of the research study, which included reminding participants that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time. I then transitioned into each section of the interview guide (see Appendix B). The first section asked participants about their university experience and the transition to post-secondary. The second section focused on a series of questions investigating cyberbullying, ending with questions about prevention and response strategies for cyberbullying at the post-secondary level. Throughout the interview dialogue, follow-up and probing questions were asked, which helped produce more detail on the topics discussed within the interview guide (Hermanowicz, 2002; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017; Whiting, 2008; Roulston & Choi, 2018). I aimed to elicit "thick description" to generate a detailed, rich corpus of data (Geertz, 1973). Thick description refers to layers of deeper, dense, detailed information, or descriptions of social life (Geertz, 1973), which allows researchers to decipher the data and make patterns within the data explicit, putting them into context (Emerson, 2001; Holloway, 1997).

At the end of each interview, extensive memoing took place. Memos encourage researchers to look at the data in new ways, serving as a record for the researcher to detail their initial thoughts, interpretations, and ideas, as well as elaborate on processes, assumptions, and actions throughout the research process (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Urquhart, 2012). A major benefit of memo writing is how the memos aid the researcher in drawing and linking analytical interpretations prior to formally analyzing the data (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Glaser, 1998). Memo writing also helps with abstraction as researchers can use memos to take a step back from the data, be more creative in the research process, and brainstorm their findings and relationships between the data (Charmaz, 2006;

Uraquhart, 2012). Thus, through memoing, researchers have freedom to explore and reflect on their data, spurring ideas in narrative form early in the analytic process (Charmaz, 2006).

Within my memos, I first detailed my thoughts and feelings regarding the interview itself by writing a short summary of the interview. Within these summaries, I listed key points participants discussed, noted anything that stood out, drew connections between interviews, and identified initial codes and potential themes I saw emerging. Returning to the memos during the coding and analysis phases of the research was beneficial as they reminded me of patterns within the data I identified during data collection, helped me to title the codes in the analysis, and provided additional layers of meaning to the codes that were derived from the analysis phase (Charmaz, 2006). As well, as a reflexive practice, in the memos, I wrote short notes reflecting on my role as the researcher, which included brief details about the progress of the research project, the research strategy, and my strengths and weaknesses (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Whiting, 2008). While not an overly common practice when writing memos, as a researcher in the early stages of my career, I felt it was important to reflect on my role in the research to identify what was or was not working in asking questions and probing participants as well as strategies and suggestions to improve for future interviews (Holmes, 2020; Lofland et al., 2005; see section 3.7 “Role of the researcher: Reflexivity & positionality”).

3.3 Sample

Twenty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduate students ranging in age from 19 to 24, with a mean age of 20 years (*SD*=1.2) (see Table 2). Nineteen participants were women, and two were men. Fifteen participants were born in Ontario, Canada, and six participants were born outside of Canada. Only five participants attended an affiliated college, with the rest attending the main campus. All but one participant was enrolled in full-time studies. Fifteen participants lived off campus with roommates, five participants lived off campus with family, one lived alone off campus, and one lived on campus, in residence with roommates. In terms of employment, nearly half of participants (10 participants) were unemployed, with many expressing that their employment status was impacted by COVID-19 while the others reported working part-time. Twelve participants said they were involved in unpaid work, such as internships and volunteering.

In terms of digital media use, all but one participant reported they most often access the Internet at home with the remaining participant accessing the Internet mostly at school.

Table 2. Participant demographics.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Place of Birth	Study Year	Living arrangements	Paid Work	Unpaid Work
Anna Johnson	21	Woman	Canada	4	Off campus, with roommates	Part-time	Yes
Aisha Ali	19	Woman	Canada	2	Off campus, with family	Part-time	No
Mai Yang	20	Woman	China	2	In residence, with roommates	None	No
Chantal O'Connor	19	Woman	Canada	2	Off campus, with roommates	Part-time	Yes
Mariam Nasri	19	Woman	Egypt	2	Off campus, with family	None	No
Farrah Hassan	21	Woman	Pakistan	4	Off campus, with roommates	Part-time	Yes
Zara Nazim	20	Woman	Canada	3	Off campus, with roommates	None	Yes
Sophie Torres	21	Woman	Canada	4	Off campus, with roommates	None	No
Yasmin Koury	21	Woman	Canada	4	Off campus, with roommates	None	Yes
Isabelle Martin	20	Woman	Canada	3	Off campus, with roommates	Part-time	Yes
Becky Chen	21	Woman	Canada	4	Off campus, with roommates	Part-time	Yes
Louis Beaumont	20	Man	Canada	3	Off campus, with family	Part-time	Yes
Charlie Russo	22	Man	Canada	3	Off campus, with roommates	None	No
Ara Mok	21	Woman	China	3	Off campus, with family	Part-time	Yes
Kris Reid	20	Woman	Canada	3	Off campus, with roommates	None	No
Eloise Abbey	21	Woman	Russia	4	Off campus, with roommates	None	No
Zoe Arnott	19	Woman	Canada	2	Off campus, with roommates	None	No
Maria Symanski	21	Woman	Canada	4	Off campus, with family	None	Yes
Alexis Anderson	19	Woman	Canada	2	Off campus, with roommates	Part-time	Yes
Mi-cha Kim	19	Woman	South Korea	3	Off campus, alone	Part-time	No
Emma Williams	24	Woman	Canada	4	Off campus, with roommates	Part-time	Yes

Corresponding with reports from Statistics Canada (2021) on digital device ownership for young adults under age 30, all participants reported owning both a computer or laptop and a mobile phone. On average, participants reported spending six hours per day on their computer or laptop and five hours per day on their mobile phones. When asked about their digital skill level, most participants reported being either very skilled (seven participants) or fairly skilled (thirteen participants), with only one participant saying they were not very skilled. Further, participants were also asked about the social media platforms they used. All participants reported having a Facebook account, all but two participants had an Instagram account, all but two participants had a Snapchat account, twelve participants had a Twitter account, and just under half (nine participants) of participants were TikTok users. All participants reported their go-to device for using and accessing social media was their mobile phone. When asked when they access social media, participants were split between "during free time" (twelve participants) and "any spare moment" (nine participants).

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Recruitment

With COVID-19 restrictions in place, recruitment took place electronically between September 2020 and August 2021. At the beginning of the fall and winter semesters, recruitment emails were sent to professors and faculty/staff across undergraduate departments and programs at Western University and the affiliate colleges of Kings, Brescia, and Huron, asking for the call for participants along with recruitment poster (see Appendix C and Appendix D) to be forwarded to undergraduate students and/or posted on course pages. Reminder emails were sent out around the midway points of each semester, once again asking for the call for participants to be reshared with undergraduate students. In addition, throughout the recruitment period, the call for participants and recruitment poster were frequently posted (approximately every two weeks) on social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. On these platforms, a study-based social media account was created, and university-affiliated accounts were tagged to help share the information. On Facebook, recruitment posts were also posted in university-affiliated groups targeting undergraduate students.

Students interested in participating in the study were asked to email a temporary university email that was generated for the duration of data collection (from August 2020 through August 2021), which was accessed only by myself and the principal investigator, Dr.

Quan-Haase. This email served the purpose of communicating with potential participants. Upon initial contact, participants received a return email with a brief description of the study, an electronic written consent form with instructions for how to electronically sign the document, and they were asked to provide a few dates and times they were available to schedule the interview (see Appendix E and Appendix F). Participants were encouraged to ask any questions before giving their consent. Once the consent form was returned and participants indicated their availability, the interview was scheduled. At this time, participants received a second email informing them of the scheduled interview date and time and were asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire at their leisure, but before the interview. A third email was sent to participants 24 hours before the interview to remind them of their participation and to provide the Zoom link (with ID and password). To maintain confidentially and ensure the participants were comfortable participating, they were also given instructions for how to change their screen name on Zoom if they preferred to do so. At the end of each interview, participants received a debriefing email thanking them for their time participating in the research study (see Appendix G) along with a resource flyer with local, national, and international online and offline cyberbullying-specific resources should they want or need any follow-up or would like more information (see Appendix H). In appreciation of their time, all participants were compensated with a Cdn$5.00 Starbucks e-gift card, which was sent immediately following the follow-up, debriefing email.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, and to protect the health and safety of participants and myself, interviews were conducted via Zoom (see Gray, Wong-Wylie, Rempel, & Cook, 2020). No in-person interviews took place. The interviews lasted an average of 90 minutes with the shortest lasting 50 minutes and the longest lasting 140 minutes. To maintain confidentiality, participants were assigned a pseudonym that reflected their gender and ethnicity. In the final write-up of the results, all supporting quotations from participants are annotated with this pseudonym as well as the participant's age and gender.

3.4.2 Participants and ethics precautions

All study instruments were submitted to the Western Research Ethics Board (WREB) for approval (Project ID: 116238). Approval was obtained August 26th, 2020 (see Appendix I). However, six months into data collection, on March 2nd, 2021, an amendment to this ethics application was submitted in attempts to target recruitment to obtain additional male participants as, at this time, there were only two men who participated in the study. The aim

of making this amendment was to help increase the representativeness of the sample and foster men's voices. The ethics amendment was approved March 24th, 2021 (see Appendix J).

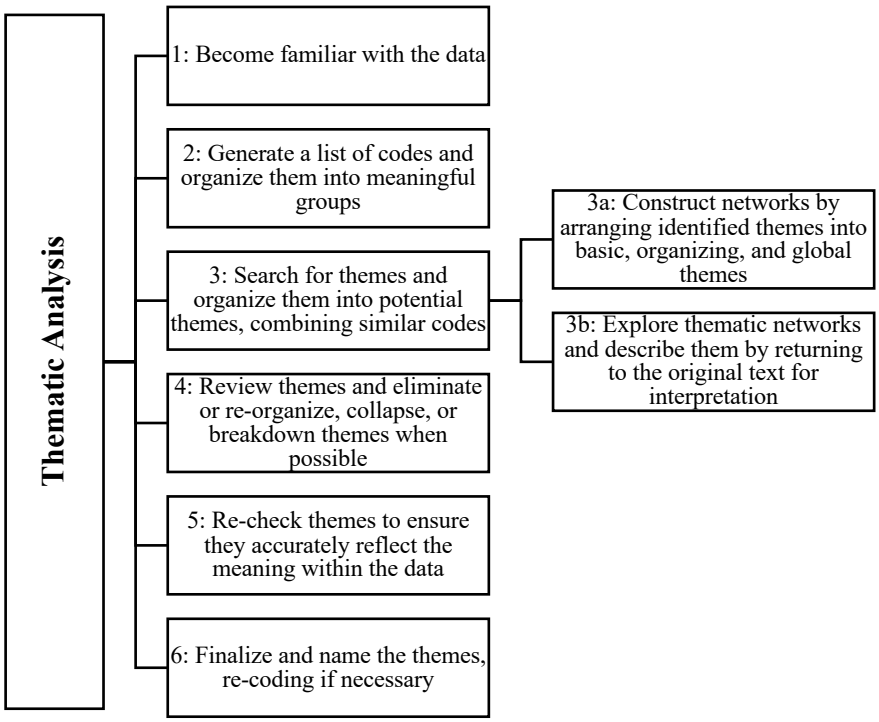
3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Thematic analysis

With permission from the interviewees, all interviews were audio and video recorded, but only the audio file was saved upon the completion of each interview. The audio file was downloaded then later transcribed verbatim (Hermanowicz, 2002; Kowal & O'Connell, 2014). During transcription, all personal and potentially identifying information was removed.

Once all the data were collected, the first step in my data analysis was to merge the results from the questionnaire with the corresponding interview transcript to be able to holistically evaluate and analyze the data. Once these were paired, I conducted a thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for thematic analysis (see Figure 2). I chose to conduct a thematic analysis because it allowed for better organization of the data, which helped to uncover deeper messages and connections behind what young adults have to say regarding their digital media use, online behaviours and practices, building and maintaining their social relationships, and, most importantly, cyberbullying.

Figure 2. Steps to conducting a thematic analysis.



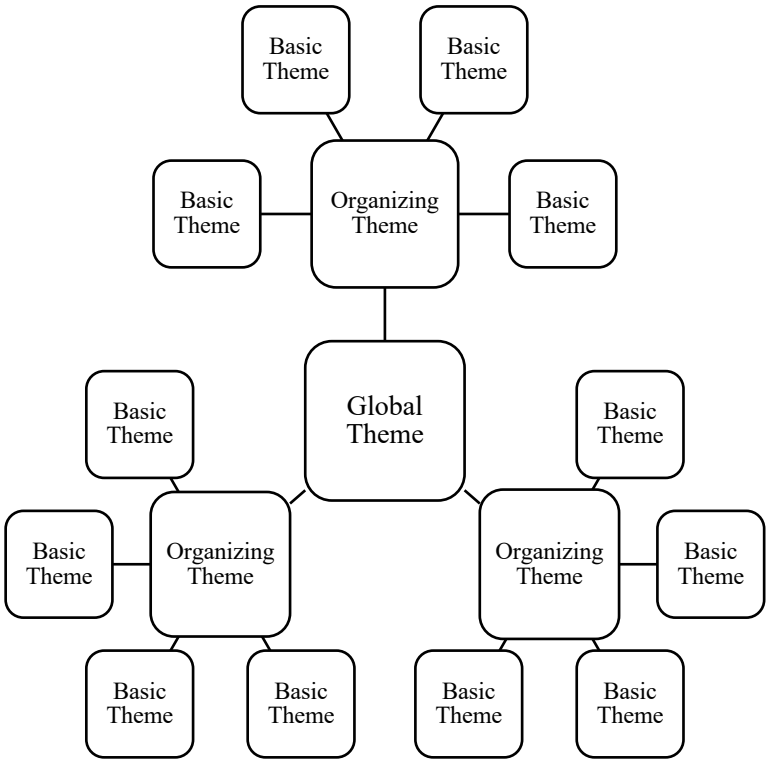
My thematic analysis began with step one, which was to become familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To do this, I conducted a textual analysis of the interview transcripts to reveal the tones behind the text and initial impressions with and across the data set (McKee, 2003). By becoming familiar with the data, I was immersed within it, which led me to begin step two, which was to begin identifying preliminary codes. Coding took place inductively, meaning the codes emerged organically out of the data and were not derived from a pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Taking the advice of Braun and Clarke (2006), I coded as many potential themes and patterns as possible while also being sure to code extracts of data as inclusively and precisely as possible without losing the meaning or context of the information being coded. The coding process took place through multiple rounds, spanning several weeks.

Once complete, I moved to step three, which involved searching for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To do so, I reviewed and sorted through the list of codes, combining like codes together. To better construct, organize, and visualize themes, as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, I created web-like illustrations (see Figure 3). Here, I distinguished between a hierarchy of themes: basic, organizing, and global (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Basic themes were the individual pieces of data or codes that when coupled with other basic themes, created organizing themes. Organizing themes, also referred to as "clusters of significance," summarized the messages within basic themes to reveal what was going on within and across texts (Attride-Sterling, 2001). Organizing themes produced global themes, which encompassed the principal meaning within the entire piece of data – they summarized the interpretations drawn. The global themes revealed the deeper meanings, beyond what individual participants said, at the latent level (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Generating these overarching, global themes was an iterative process whereby I had to simultaneously explore the list of codes and extracted data, build the themes, and return to the original transcripts to ensure that participants' responses were correctly interpreted, and the themes were accurately capturing the data.

Next, during step four, I reviewed and refined the constructed themes. This involved two levels: (1) reviewing the coded data extracts for each theme to ensure they formed a coherent pattern, and (2) considering the validity of individual themes relative to the entire data set to ensure the themes accurately reflected the meaning in the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through this process, I collapsed and combined similar themes,

broke down or separated complex themes, and eliminated redundant themes. Once complete, I had a better picture of what my themes were, how they fit together, and the overall story/stories that were being told within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I could then move to step five to define and name the themes. Here, the entire list of themes was rechecked and finalized (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For each theme included in my final list, I also defined any subthemes that emerged. With a complete list of themes, I could move to step six, producing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which, in this case, is this dissertation. In the write-up of the findings, and to enhance the narrative being told, I went beyond description of the theme to include detailed and vivid data extracts or examples (e.g., direct quotes from participants in the data set) as evidence.

Figure 3. Example theme construction.



3.5.2 Rigour

Rigour refers to "the degree in which research methods are scrupulously and meticulously carried out in order to recognize important influences" on the research study (Pickard, 2013, p. 326). Establishing rigour implies that the researcher carefully planned, developed, analyzed, and evaluated their research, taking special care in presenting and effectively communicating their research process as well as their research results (Allende, 2004). In

qualitative work, markers of rigour include credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (see Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Achieving these elements, some have argued, centre on reflexivity in qualitative work where researchers are attentive to transparency, accuracy, purposivity, utility, propriety, accessibility, and specificity (see Finlay, 2006; Jootun & McGhee, 2009, Porter, 2007).

By establishing rigour, it helps guarantee that the study results are valid, reliable, and trustworthy (McKechnie, Chabot, Dalmer, Julien, & Mabbott, 2016; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). In this study, the following measures were taken to strengthen credibility: careful documentation and detailed descriptions at each stage in the research process, triangulation of data sources (pre-interview questionnaires and interview data), utilizing thick description, identification and exploration of any potential outlier responses, debriefing with participants, and reflexive memoing, which recorded coding decisions, developing of themes and interpretations, and potential links to theory (Babbie, 2010; Connaway & Powell, 2010; Genuis, 2015; Foster, 2005; McKechnie et al., 2016). Through these steps, it was my goal to make sure this research was conducted as best as possible, ensuring readers that they could trust the research, and make sense of the work and subsequently the research findings.

3.5.3 Assessing saturation

In qualitative inquiry, the "gold standard" to determine sample sizes and determining theoretical advances is saturation (Morse, 2015; Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015). Saturation refers to "the point in data collection and analysis when new incoming data produces little or no new information to address the research question(s)" (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020, p. 2). Thus, a researcher has reached saturation when no new codes or concepts emerge (van Rijnsoever, 2017).

Persisting within the literature are debates on differing types of saturation, particularly between theoretical saturation and data or thematic saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Lowe, Norris, Farris, & Babbage, 2018). Theoretical saturation is rooted in grounded theory approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Saunders et al., 2018), and occurs when researchers are "satisfied that the properties and dimensions of the concepts and conceptual relationships selected to render the target event are fully described and that they have captured its complexity and variation" (Sandelowski, 2008, p. 875). Similarly, data or thematic saturation refers to identifying redundancy in the data, but there is no necessary link

between data and theory. This means saturation focuses on identifying no new codes or themes rather than complete theoretical categories (Saunders et al., 2018). Achieving data or thematic saturation, then, occurs when a researcher has seen or heard something so often that they can anticipate it (Roy et al., 2015). As Guest et al. (2020) argue, since a lot of qualitative research does not use the grounded theory approach, but rather an inductive thematic analysis, data saturation may be more critical to achieve than theoretical saturation.

Regardless of the type of saturation achieved, a problem with saturation, in general, is that it is "elastic" (Mason, 2010). This means there is no simple, clear-cut way to determine if/when saturation has been reached (Braun & Clarke, 2021; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013) because qualitative research is so diverse (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Without a concrete set of guidelines, Fusch and Ness (2015) suggest rather than focusing on sample size, what matters more is rich and thick data. This is because a large sample does not necessarily guarantee saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). As a result, qualitative researchers ought to focus on obtaining data that are both thick and rich in quality (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

Drawing on the literature and empirical investigations into obtaining saturation, the results are mixed as to at what point a study has reached saturation, namely because this depends on the complexity of the research topic (Guest & Namey, 2017; van Rijnsoever, 2017). For example, Constantinou et al. (2017) conducted 12 semi-structured interviews resulting in 401 raw codes that were then refined, categorized, and constructed into themes. They found their "saturation threshold" to be reached by the fifth interview as this was when no new themes emerged (Constantinou et al., 2017). Likewise, Guest et al. (2006) found saturation to be reached between 7 and 12 interviews whereas Namey et al. (2016) reported that saturation was found between 8 and 16 interviews. While there may be variation in when saturation is achieved, as research indicates it largely depends on the study itself, saturation is important because it helps ensure rigor and validity (Morse, 2017; Roy et al., 2015) while also helping to guard against misinformation to enhance the credibility of the research (van Rijnsoever, 2017). Van Rijnsoever (2017) suggests repeating codes protect against misinformation because the code is observed multiple times, suggesting there have been no false codes, expression of information for social desirability, or accidental errors. Thus, qualitative researchers assessing saturation should look within the data set at similar concepts and processes in different instances, experiences, contexts, events, and so on (Morse, 2017)

to focus on the "strands" of information and what extent they are continuous (Saunders et al., 2018).

For this research, I assessed whether saturation was reached upon the completion of 21 semi-structured interviews. The goal when creating the interview guide was to structure my interview questions around the research questions, giving a sense of what types of information I was hoping to facilitate within each section of questions throughout the interview guide. For example, interview guide questions asking participants about what they thought of when they heard the word cyberbullying, describing what cyberbullying is and entails, and their experiences of cyberbullying all would help address research questions relating to how students are defining, perceiving, and evaluating cyberbullying. However, there was no pre-determined list of codes. Rather, I intended that the data analysis phase would be inductive whereby codes would emerge organically from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This inductive approach suggests that saturation is reached when no new codes are identified and no new theoretical insights are gained (Saunders et al., 2018).

To assess saturation at this point in my study, and to determine whether I would need to continue data collection, I drew on the interview transcripts as well as the memos. In my memo notes, I referred to possible codes and potential themes that were emerging and detailed my impressions based on the interview participant's responses. However, I noticed that not all research questions or sections of the interview guide were achieving saturation equally or at the same time. For instance, I saw preliminary codes beginning to repeat for sections pertaining to perspectives around defining and identifying cyberbullying after interview number 8, whereas the section addressing the characteristics and features of online environments impacting perceptions of cyberbullying had repeating themes after approximately 15 interviews. Likewise, the final section, which asked questions relating to prevention and responses to cyberbullying, had recurring themes later in the data set after about 14 interviews. Based on this information, I can say that upon conducting the remaining interviews, to total of 21 participants, these same impressions and themes were being confirmed with relatively little to no new information emerging, indicating saturation was achieved. It is important to note that in each interview, different perspectives, experiences, stories, and opinions were being discussed but the information they were discussing related to the overarching topics, which signified the code being discussed repeatedly.

Despite determining that saturation had been reached, I noticed my sample was heavily influenced by the perspectives of women (*n*=19). To evaluate this, I reread through the transcripts of the two men participants to assess and determine how similar and/or different these were. This gave me a better insight into whether more men would need to be recruited to (1) try to make my sample more representative and (2) ensure these two interviews were not outliers within my data set. Upon further inspection, I determined that the two men offered new, unique perspectives to the data; however, they were not as strikingly different as one may expect. Rather, these interviewees reflected on the same or similar ideas that women discussed and reflected on. What differed, however, was the lens through which they explained themselves and their perspectives. For example, one of the men was part of a varsity team at Western and their examples, while focusing on similar issues raised in the other interviews, made some references to gender-specific factors and dynamics relating to cyberbullying (i.e., girls seem to be more targeted and criticized online). While specific to the varsity team and their own experience, similar examples and dynamics were also reflected on by women in relation to their own friend groups, residence halls, and academic programs or departments.

As for the second man, their perspective differed in the sense they were less active on social media; however, this was not unique to this participant as other women participants also elaborated and reflected on their social media use where some were much more digitally active than others. At the same time, this participant, along with several other women participants, expressed concerns over online toxicity and how cyberbullying is perpetuated online via different features and affordances. Thus, their perspective was not *that* much different, meaning there were no real, significant gender disparities upon rereading and reflecting on the two men participants' transcripts in comparison to the other 19 women participants. Based on this, these two interviews helped to contribute to saturation rather than creating additional barriers to reaching saturation. Going forward, it was deemed beneficial to try to include more men in the sample but was not detrimental or necessary for the integrity of this dissertation. Further, these two perspectives were considered integral to the data set, and it would have been a detriment to not include them in the final sample (i.e., if removed, only using the 19 interviews with women).

3.6 Methodological limitations

3.6.1 A sample lacking diversity

While efforts were made to recruit a diverse range of undergraduate students across Western University and the affiliate colleges, my sample fell into a common pitfall when recruiting university students: the sample was dominated by women participants (Barlow & Cromer, 2006; McCray, King, & Bailly, 2005). Given that research (Frenette & Zeman, 2007) and Western university statistics (Western University, 2020) have shown typically more women are enrolled in undergraduate programs (Pinkerton, 2017), this representation in my sample was still more than expected. It would be expected for there be to a nearly equal distribution between men and women participants, or at least proportionate to the percentage enrolled at post-secondary institutions (Dickinson, Adelson, & Owen, 2012). Research investigating this challenge suggests this is due to women being more willing to participate in research studies advertised on campuses (Dickinson et al., 2012), particularly when the studies are related to topics they are interested in or connect with in some way (Gaither et al., 2003). I believe this is possible for the topic of cyberbullying because the literature suggests cyberbullying disproportionately impacts women (Choi & Lee, 2017; Faucher et al., 2014; Sobba, Paez, & ten Bensel, 2017). While efforts were made via an amendment to the ethics protocol to recruit a more diverse range of perspectives that would increase the representativeness of the sample, my dissertation research remains tilted toward the views of women.

In addition to the lack of gender diversity in the sample, the sample underrepresented individuals from a diverse set of ethnic groups, particularly BIPOC individuals. As a result, future studies should focus on recruiting more diverse samples. This is because, as past research shows, investigations of members of ethnic minority groups provide greater insight into their unique perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying, which are important for more targeted prevention and response strategies (Kowalski et al., 2020; Sheanoda et al., 2021). Thus, as is true with the broader cyberbullying literature (Barboza-Salerno & Schiamberg, 2020), more research is needed that focuses on BIPOC individuals, primarily their experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying at the post-secondary level to garner a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. In turn, this may reveal specialized knowledge pertaining to cyberbullying occurring among particular ethnic groups as well as lend deeper insight into how to best handle cyberbullying and better support individuals from certain ethnic groups who are targeted by cyberbullying.

3.6.2 Conducting data collection during COVID-19: The challenges of Zoom

The original intention of this dissertation was to include both semi-structured interviews and focus groups as my methods for data collection. The focus group data would complement the data obtained in the interviews by generating rich conversations between participants, specifically by allowing participants to share their attitudes and beliefs with opportunities to elaborate on similarities and debate differences, as well as give rich information about a range of perspectives and/or experiences (Carey, 1994; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008; Rezabek, 2000). However, with COVID-19 regulations changing how data collection could be carried out at universities, and moving the entire project online, the focus groups were greatly impacted. In particular, the first challenge came with participants indicating their preference to participate in either the interview or focus group. All but three participants preferred the interview. I do not have a concrete explanation for the lack of interest from participants to participate in the focus group, but I speculate there may be concerns around the virtual nature of the focus group, specifically concerns associated with confidentiality and anonymity. While all focus groups face challenges around guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity, I believe conducting focus groups online presented additional layers of concerns for potential participants. For example, online, participants could screenshot, record, or otherwise have the potential to reveal the identity of their fellow participants. Further, because the research topic could be sensitive in nature, it may have been hard for some participants to share and express their perceptions, thoughts and ideas, or experiences in front of others in a focus group setting, resulting in their preference to participate in an interview.

For the three women who participated in the first and only focus group, rich, detailed information was obtained. However, in practice, the focus group was more like three interviews being conducted simultaneously where each participant would take turns answering the questions presented with little to no interaction between participants. Reflecting on the lack of success of this focus group for achieving the outcomes a focus group desires to obtain, I attribute this to the challenges of virtual data collection. For instance, two of the three participants had their cameras off, which further removed participants from being able to see one another and perceive physical and social cues as they would have if the focus group took place in person. Instead, given that this was a focus group setting with multiple participants and not a one-on-one interview, participants could, much more easily than in-person, use strategies to “hide” from others (i.e., turning off their video)

(Zhao & Elesh, 2008) or cave into local-level distractions (Chen & Hinton, 1999; Howlett, 2021). As a result, participants could "be there" (i.e., present; a voice on the phone or image displayed on the screen) without really "being there together" (i.e., co-present; active; fully engaged) (Schroeder, 2006). This is especially true for those with cameras off, as the lack of visual cues between focus group participants made it difficult to establish co-presence, build rapport, and feel at ease interacting with one another (Howlett, 2021; Zhao & Elesh, 2008); all commonly cited issues for virtual data collection on video-based platforms like Skype and Zoom (Cater, 2011; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Sullivan, 2012; Weller, 2015). I believe these challenges were partly attributed to participants not having the chance to engage in "hallway" talk before and/or throughout the focus group as they would have been able to in-person. The additional barriers present online directly impacted the way the focus group took place, which is likely why the focus group turned into three separate interviews. Despite not being as successful as intended, these three participants have been included in the final sample but are treated as separate interview participants rather than as a focus group.

3.7 Role of the researcher: Reflexivity & positionality

With research being a shared space between the researcher and their research participants (England, 1994), it is undeniable that the researcher – and their identities – could have an impact on the research process (Bourke, 2014; Holmes, 2020), particularly on the data collection and data analysis stages (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). This is especially true in qualitative research where the researcher often becomes an integral part of the research as the data collection instrument (Bourke, 2014; Creswell, 1994), and is intimately involved in the narrative or dialogue (Miller & Crabtree, 2004). To acknowledge their role and reflect on how and in what ways they influence their study (Treharne & Riggs, 2015), researchers are encouraged to be reflexive. Reflexivity is an ongoing process of self-reflection (Patnaik, 2013; Treharne & Riggs, 2015) that allows researchers to better articulate, acknowledge, and disclose their selves in the research to understand their part in it and influence on it (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Corlett & Mavin, 2018). A key part of being reflexive, then, includes taking inventory of the lenses through which researchers are engaging in their research, such as age, social class, race/ethnicity, sex/gender, religious beliefs, previous career, and personality (Bourke, 2014; Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Holmes, 2020). By being reflexive, a researcher can better identify and develop their positionality (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019; Macbeth, 2001; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Reflecting on my positionality relative to my research topic and the reason why I chose cyberbullying as my focus, I am brought back to high school when murmurs in the hallway circulated about a young girl named Amanda Todd who took her own life after being cyberbullied. I vividly recall feeling overwhelmed, having knots in my stomach, wondering how this could happen and how devastated I would be if this were to happen to someone from my own social circle. Little did I know that many years later I would find myself reflecting on those feelings once more. During a discussion in a master's level cultural criminology class, I recalled a youth and media class I was enrolled in during my year abroad two years prior. When we were discussing interpersonal conflict and mediated portrayals of crime, in my head, I had a moment where I was brought back to those feelings that I had in high school; the feeling of uneasiness arose when someone brought up the topic of cyberbullying. I remember leaving that class with ideas swirling in my head about how I would incorporate these thoughts into a master's level thesis. When I delved deeper into the research, I quickly realized that despite a growing body of evidence, we still did not know much about cyberbullying – especially at the post-secondary level – and I chose to pursue this as my research topic.

While it seems that my conscious effort to research cyberbullying stemmed from varying discussions around related topics prior to my master's thesis and doctoral dissertation research, thinking about my positionality more critically, I find myself further reflecting on both my personal and professional experiences, knowing that perhaps subconsciously, cyberbullying had always been a topic of interest. Before continuing my education at the doctoral level, and even throughout my time as a Ph.D. student, I have been engaged in several positions, both for work and volunteering, that entailed direct communication, contact, and collaboration with youth and young adults. These roles entailed being a resident assistant, the Substance Education Coordinator for the University of Windsor, and volunteering with the Youth Diversion program of Windsor-Essex as well as Big Brothers Big Sisters. I have also been a teaching assistant, student mentor both on- and off-campus, as well as a direct support person for Family Respite Services. Through these roles, as well as in my personal life, I have had experience, both directly and indirectly, with cyberbullying where I have seen and heard about the impact of cyberbullying victimization on those targeted. I believe that these experiences have had a major role in shaping me not only as a person, but also my research and research-related interests.

Further, reflecting on this research and how I potentially could have positively influenced data collection was because I am of similar age to the participants in this research study and attend the same institution where data were being collected (see Holmes, 2020; Manohar, Liamputtong, Bhole, & Arora, 2017). In this way, I have more intimate knowledge of the context of the university environment, anecdotal evidence given by participants, and/or context-specific slang that participants were using. In addition, being an active social media user, and being active on a variety of platforms like those participants were using, and a member of university-specific social media groups, I had a deeper layer of understanding of the evidence being presented and the examples that participants were drawing from. In addition, given my previous experience working and volunteering in university-related settings, my knowledge of the barriers and problems university students face privileged me to understand the experiences, concerns, and barriers students face on campus. In many cases, participants were open and willing to discuss their experiences, concerns, and frustrations relating to cyberbullying, which indicated to me that they felt I knew where they were coming from and that they saw me as an insider (Holmes, 2020; Merton, 1972; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In some cases, however, the perception that I was an insider created barriers, and I had to probe participants to elaborate on topics that they assumed I fully understood.

Even though the focus of this project was not geared toward specifically understanding cyberbullying among marginalized populations, given evidence that suggests cyberbullying disproportionately impacts certain groups of individuals, such as women (Baldry et al., 2015; Beyazit et al., 2017; Brody & Vangelisti, 2017; Faucher et al., 2014), members of the LGBTQ+ community (Abreu & Kenny, 2018; Espinoza & Wright, 2018; Pescitelli, 2019), and racialized minorities (Forbes et al., 2020; Kowalski et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2018; Patton et al., 2013), I was open for these discussions to emerge within my own research. However, I recognized that it was necessary and important for me to consider my own positionality as a white cisgender woman and how this could potentially impact not only data collection, but also disclosures of information during the interviews. For instance, I recognized that being a woman could have impacted the willingness of individuals to participate in this research, such as making other woman feel they were in a safe space to discuss and disclose their experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying while men may have been more reluctant to participate and discuss cyberbullying with a woman researcher (see Manohar et al., 2017). Thus, when individuals did participate, since I did not know the

intimate details of their gender identities nor their life experiences, it was important for me to implement strategies during the interviews (i.e., active listening; asking follow-up or clarification questions) that made participants, both men and women, feel they were safe, being understood, and heard (Prior, 2018). This is especially important for cross-gender research as researchers need to be aware of potential challenges and reluctance of participants to share (Brandes, 2008). On the other hand, it should be noted that there was also the potential that being a woman researcher could have been a benefit for the men who chose to participate; research suggests that the presence of a woman researcher may help men to share their perspectives and experiences as they feel they would receive an empathic or understanding response in comparison to a male researcher (Kusek & Smiley, 2014).

I also recognized that there may have been experiences and perceptions of men participants that differed from those of women and that I may not entirely understand, which I noticed when participants discussed their responses and gave examples. For example, several women participants would make remarks (i.e., "you know what I mean"), implying that they felt I could relate to what they were saying, making me privy to the point of view that they were coming from. I noticed this mostly when discussing examples relating to gendered perceptions surrounding cyberbullying, such as women being perceived as more engaged in drama and the dynamics of friend groups such as how women act with their close friends. In contrast, in the discussions with men participants, these instances did not occur. Rather, the men made their replies more explicit, not necessarily showing any indication that they assumed I understood, and thoroughly described their perceptions and sometimes justified why they felt that way. The reason for this is largely due to communication being easier when the researcher and participant are of the same gender where there is mutual respect for gender and culture (see Gill & Maclean, 2011; Liamputtong, 2010; Suwankhong & Liamputtong, 2015). As such, sharing the same gender can enhance the research space, leading to reduced social distance and increased comfortability, and provide participants with a positive, comfortable, and beneficial experience (Finch, 1993; Manohar et al., 2017).

In addition to gender, I also carefully considered race and ethnicity. For example, being white, despite recently uncovering our family's Indigenous ancestry and am a First Nations person, I was a cultural outsider (Hammersley, 1993; Merriam et al., 2001; Merton, 1972) and could not claim to have had the same experiences as others of Indigenous heritage or other BIPOC individuals. Given that cyberbullying victimization is a very intimate,

impactful experience, coupled with being a white researcher investigating a potentially sensitive topic, some individuals may have been deterred from participating out of fear they will be, among other things, judged or further marginalized (Fletcher, 2014). When they did participate, however, I recognize that I would not be able to fully understand disclosures by racialized participants but would remain open to listening to their experiences and perceptions to learn from them. An advantage of the outsider perspective is the ability to not take anything for granted and allow participants to explain and expand on their thoughts without assuming you know or understand (Merton, 1972). While the study's sample was limited in diversity, there were participants who reflected on their race/ethnicity, indicating various challenges they have encountered during their transition to post-secondary, reflecting on cyberbullying examples and stories of themselves as well as others, and speculated about the potential impacts of cyberbullying victimization on other students from marginalized groups.

As suggested within the literature, to overcome any potential challenges associated with a researcher's positionality (e.g., bias; too heavy an influence) (Patnaik, 2013), I ensured that I was engaging reflexively throughout the duration of the research project (May & Perry, 2017). To do this, at the beginning of the research project, I assessed the choices being made in the design and methodology of this study (Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Holmes, 2020; Patnaik, 2013). This helped to ensure methodological reflexivity, which is when a researcher standardizes their procedures in conducting their research to help neutralize their influence on the project (Patnaik, 2013). For example, while I did leave room in my research design to probe and ask follow-up questions, all participants were read the same script introducing the study and were guided through a standardized interview guide of pre-determined questions.

Most importantly, upon completion of the interview – when the data set was still in its raw state (Patnaik, 2013) – as a reflexive practice, I kept extensive memos (see Treharne & Riggs, 2015), detailing my reflections on the interview, impressions I had based on what the participants said, and any potential themes present in the data thus far, and made comparisons between the present interview and those that already took place. In these memos I also included reflections on my role as a researcher where I detailed my thoughts and feelings regarding the interview itself, my own attitudes and/or responses to the participant, and if and how I felt I impacted any of the interviewee's responses, and I identified my strengths and weaknesses through the interview process (Patnaik, 2013; Whiting, 2008). These memos

were especially important during the data analysis phase where I could refer to them to be reminded of any pre-conceived ideas or assumptions that I had before beginning the formal analysis (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). To ensure that any similarity between myself and the participants did not affect the coding and data analysis phases, I ensured that the research design, as well as the findings, were contextualized using additional literature (Bourke, 2014; Patnaik, 2013). All in all, I believe my positionality as a researcher, particularly recognizing my more intimate knowledge of the university context and student life through both my personal and professional experiences, was beneficial for this study because I could better relate to the participants and their experiences, which subsequently eased tensions and anxieties to allow for more open dialogue that led to fruitful insights.

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4. Out with the old? Evaluating cyberbullying from the perspectives of young adults in post-secondary

4.1 Introduction

Cyberbullying is an online phenomenon affecting individuals across the life course (Myers & Cowie, 2019). While engagement in offline bullying decreases as children and adolescents transition to young adulthood, the risk of cyberbullying increases (PREVNet, 2019). In fact, young adults, defined as those under age 25 (United Nations, 2020), are affected by cyberbullying (Statistics Canada, 2016), with prevalence rates ranging from 8% (Smith & Yoon, 2013) to upwards of 30% (Mishna et al., 2018). Associated with cyberbullying experiences in young adulthood, scholars have reported more serious, severe, and long-term consequences such as increased anxiety, higher levels of depression, and suicide ideation (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2019; Mishna et al., 2018). Despite such evidence, however, the majority of cyberbullying research remains focused on children and adolescents, primarily through research with samples of students in the K-12 school system, namely because of the misperception that cyberbullying largely only affects this population (see Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, 2020). While it is true that cyberbullying is a major problem among younger cohorts, and prevalence rates are usually higher (Hinduja & Patchin, 2021), that does not negate the need for attention to be paid to cyberbullying among young adults (see Cassidy et al., 2019).

While research attempting to better understand cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood has increased over the last decade, one critical oversight has been the lack of investigations into understanding cyberbullying from young adults' points of view (Sheanoda, Bussey, & Jones, 2021). Rather, much work has recycled cyberbullying definitions and criteria (e.g., repetition; intentional/willful; experienced harm; an imbalance of power) derived from studies of cyberbullying centring on children and adolescents (see Patchin & Hinduja, 2006) assuming they apply to young adults (Alqahtani et al., 2018). However, these definitions and criteria are not necessarily transferable. For instance, Sheanoda et al. (2021) found that young adults disagree with academic-centred definitions of cyberbullying, and their conceptualizations of the criteria for determining cyberbullying sometimes divert from the benchmarks used in the cyberbullying literature.

It can be speculated that these differences are attributed to changing digital environments (e.g., new social media platforms), which have subsequently caused a shift in

young people's online practices (boyd, 2014). This necessitates researchers to be adaptable and flexible to how online behaviours, like cyberbullying (e.g., what constitutes cyberbullying; how cyberbullying is determined), shift, change, evolve, and are made more complicated (e.g., distinguishing between different online behaviours like drama and cyberbullying) (Marwick & boyd, 2014) alongside life-course-related changes (e.g., transition to post-secondary; changing social dynamics) (Myers & Cowie, 2019). This is because, like with younger age groups, to classify their online practices (e.g., distinguish between cyberbullying and digital forms of drama), young people evaluate online behaviours according to situation and context (Marwick & boyd, 2014; Ranney et al., 2020). This signals that these factors matter more than relying on a singular, narrow definition of cyberbullying. Considering the findings by Sheanoda et al. (2021), this may also be true for young adults. However, no further work has been conducted that delves deeper into young adults' perceptions of cyberbullying, particularly according to which criteria they evaluate cyberbullying behaviours. Therefore, more research is needed that teases out the complexities of cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood, specifically the types of behaviours young adults deem to be cyberbullying and according to what criteria they make these decisions.

The purpose of this paper is to build on the work of Sheanoda et al. (2021) to facilitate and investigate the perspectives and opinions of post-secondary students regarding how they perceive and evaluate cyberbullying. More specifically, the goal of this work is to address questions around the applicability of cyberbullying criteria used in the literature and, if these do not apply, identify key dimensions young adults use to classify cyberbullying behaviours that can serve as potential alternatives to academic-centred criteria. To achieve this goal, I address the following research questions:

1. What points of reference do young adults draw upon to describe and discuss cyberbullying?
2. According to young adults, to what extent do academic-centred criteria apply when evaluating cyberbullying? Are there alternative criteria that young adults perceive to be more useful for determining and evaluating cyberbullying?

To address these questions, I draw on data collected from a set of semi-structured interviews with 21 second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduate students (see Chapter 3). This work contributes to the emerging body of literature attempting to resolve discrepancies between

academic-centred evaluations of cyberbullying and the perspectives of young adults. Gaining deeper insights into how young adults classify and evaluate cyberbullying will ensure that going forward, there is a better understanding of cyberbullying both within academia and society more broadly (Sheanoda et al., 2021). Further, with a more informed understanding of how young adults perceive and evaluate cyberbullying behaviours, there is vast potential for more effective and age-appropriate cyberbullying prevention and response initiatives as presently, such initiatives are lacking due to uncertainty around cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood (Faucher, Cassidy, & Jackson, 2020).

This paper begins with a review of the literature, outlining how cyberbullying has been conceptualized within the academic literature as well as highlighting variations in cyberbullying across the life course (i.e., childhood and adolescence to young adulthood). Next, the findings are presented. Here, evidence is provided outlining the references young adults draw upon that help inform their understanding of cyberbullying, the discrepancies young adults perceived with the existing cyberbullying criteria used in the literature, and, as an alternative to the academic-centred criteria, the four dimensions young adults identified as more appropriate for classifying cyberbullying behaviours are introduced. These dimensions include (1) who was involved, (2) the scope of harm, (3) the context in which the behaviour occurred, and (4) the platform on which the behaviour occurred. Taken together, young adults use these dimensions to first assess if a behaviour is, in fact, cyberbullying and, if so, the behaviours corresponding level of severity. These findings lead to the conclusion that it is necessary to re-evaluate how and in what ways young adults perceive and evaluate cyberbullying behaviours, which could have potentially broader implications for how cyberbullying is evaluated across age groups (e.g., high school students) and if larger-scale changes are needed (i.e., modifying or changing academic-centred criteria). The paper ends by discussing the contributions and implications derived from this work, study limitations, as well as suggestions for future research.

4.2 Literature Review

4.2.1 Conceptualizing cyberbullying: An umbrella term with ambiguous criteria

Cyberbullying is defined as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through computers, cellphones, and other electronic devices” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015, p. 11). With such a broad definition, the term cyberbullying has been used as an umbrella term encompassing a

wide range of behaviours (e.g., trolling, flaming) (Betts, 2016; Ryalls, 2018).[5] To characterize behaviours that fall under the umbrella of cyberbullying, and to distinguish cyberbullying from other forms of interpersonal harm, scholars rely on a set of criteria, which include repetition, intentional or willful, experienced harm, and an imbalance of power (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). However, with variability in the interpretation and application of these criteria, and the possibility that the digital context can impact perceptions of the existence of these factors (Gahagan et al., 2016), it is often difficult to discern what is and is not cyberbullying. For example, when cyberbullying occurs among individuals who are part of the same peer group, despite meeting the cyberbullying criteria, young people may not use the label cyberbullying (Marwick & boyd, 2014). This is because for young people, the criteria used for classifying behaviours like gossip, drama, and arguments often overlap (Marwick & boyd, 2014; Ranney et al., 2020), leaving questions around when behaviours are cyberbullying and if/when they are something else.

4.2.2 Life course differences in cyberbullying: What the current evidence says

Despite evidence that the risk of cyberbullying increases with age (PREVNet, 2019), less is known about cyberbullying occurring in later life stages, particularly young adulthood (Myers & Cowie, 2019). From what we do know, there are variations in what is considered cyberbullying. For instance, for children and adolescents, cyberbullying typically manifests itself through behaviours like mean messages, videos posted on social media, online threats, and/or having personal or private information revealed (Cowie & Myers, 2016; Myers & Cowie, 2019). Associated with these experiences are serious social consequences (i.e., ruined reputations) where young people believe their (social) lives are over (Felmlee & Faris, 2016). In comparison, cyberbullying behaviours occurring in young adulthood evolve and escalate, persisting in the form of sexting, revenge porn, public shaming, and harassment (Cowie & Myers, 2016). Unlike cyberbullying among younger age groups, these behaviours are usually more directed (i.e., targeting someone's race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability) (Myers & Cowie, 2017, 2019) and have been associated with more intense, severe, and immediate negative lifelong repercussions including irreversible personal, social, and professional

[5] It is important to note that as cyberbullying behaviours transcend into later life stages, they are not always called cyberbullying (Mishna et al., 2018). Rather, terms like online or cyber harassment and cyberstalking are used to describe the same or similar types of behaviours (Beran, Rinaldi, Bickham, & Rich, 2012; Wright, 2018).

consequences (see Brailovskaia, Teismann, & Margraf, 2018; Mishna et al., 2018; Yoon & Koo, 2020).

The heightened seriousness associated with cyberbullying outcomes for young adults can be attributed to the complexities associated with the life stage of young adulthood (e.g., added stress and/or pressure within post-secondary environments) (Wright, 2018). For instance, to a much greater extent than among younger age groups, Myers and Cowie (2019) suggest the need to consider social contexts regarding cyberbullying among young adults. This is because the dynamics of social relationships, social settings, and digital media use differ from when one was younger (Thomas et al., 2017), which presents new ways and/or motivations to engage in undesirable behaviours like cyberbullying (Al Qudah et al., 2020). For example, like in the transition from primary or middle school to high school (Evans, Borriello, & Field, 2018), in post-secondary, one's pre-existing and new social connections converge (Arslan & Guler, 2016). Using digital technologies, young adults seamlessly weave together these new social connections with their established network members (e.g., hometown friends with new friends made in post-secondary) (Al Qudah et al., 2020; Drouin et al., 2018; Sugimoto, Hank, Bowman, & Pomerantz, 2015). Resulting from the weaving together of one's social network members, combined with unique factors and/or stressors faced in post-secondary (e.g., being away from home; carving out one's identity; navigating a new social life) (Cismaru & Cismaru, 2018), more cyberbullying may occur (Baldasare et al., 2012; Yubero et al., 2017). Given a larger audience viewing, interpreting, and responding to what happens online, cyberbullying, and related outcomes, may be even more impactful and long-lasting for young adults (e.g., impact future personal and professional opportunities) (Baldasare et al., 2012; Smith & Yoon, 2013; Yoon & Koo, 2020).

Further, as with younger age groups, pending with whom the cyberbullying is occurring, it can pose differing levels of harm or risk (Crosslin & Golman, 2014). For example, when cyberbullied by a close friend or peer, the impact of cyberbullying is perceived to be much worse than had the perpetrator been a stranger or loosely connected social tie like an acquaintance (Felmlee & Faris, 2016). However, Rivituso (2014) argues that given the added value of friendships in post-secondary, being cyberbullied by a close friend could be even harder for post-secondary students, which greatly impacts, among other things, young adults' self-esteem, trust, and self-confidence. This is because university campuses (e.g., residence halls) are young adults' "temporary homes" (Wernert, 2017), and when

cyberbullying occurs, such as among close friends who are also roommates, it could lead to significant detrimental impacts such as affecting their wider relationships, disrupting social groups dynamics, and/or leading to feelings of distrust among one's other friends (Cassidy et al., 2017). Thus, examining changing dynamics from high school to post-secondary helps to better understand and assess the nature, form, and impact of cyberbullying, as these dynamics add additional layers of complexity (Faucher et al., 2015), subsequently impacting how we understand cyberbullying occurring within young adulthood at the post-secondary level.

4.2.3 Prevailing gap in the literature: Missing the perspectives of young adults

Despite attempts to expand our knowledge of cyberbullying occurring within post-secondary environments (see Cassidy et al., 2019; Mishna et al., 2018), a majority of studies have failed to "flesh out the extent, nature, form, and impact of cyberbullying at the university level" (Faucher et al., 2015, p. 104). This is because studies have largely neglected student views of cyberbullying (i.e., defining cyberbullying; what criteria they use to evaluate it) (Sheanoda et al., 2021). Instead, researchers have taken advantage of understandings of cyberbullying (e.g., definitions and criteria) derived from studies focusing on younger age groups (see Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Smith et al., 2008), assuming they apply in the post-secondary context (Alqahtani et al., 2018). However, these understandings have been critiqued by post-secondary students as being outdated (Crosslin & Golman, 2014), juvenile (Faucher et al., 2014; Gahagan et al., 2016), and misaligned with their own understandings (Sheanoda et al., 2021), resulting in many young adults failing to classify their behaviours as cyberbullying (Faucher et al., 2015).

Reluctance using the term cyberbullying is largely attributed to a prominent grey area within the literature as identified by Marwick and boyd (2014) who found that despite meeting the criteria of what should be classified as cyberbullying (e.g., takes place via digital media; can be intentional and/or causes harm; and involves differences in social power), teenagers better articulate their experiences of interpersonal conflict as drama. This is because in digital spaces, individuals are interacting with a combination of friends/peers or acquaintances (Ito et al., 2010), and when interpersonal conflict occurs, it is seen as a regular, routine part of navigating social dynamics in their social relationships (Walker, Sockman, & Koehn, 2011). Likewise, in a study of Canadian post-secondary students, Cassidy et al. (2019) found young adults reflect on the roles of subjectivity and objectivity when negotiating cyberbullying, indicating there are many factors considered when classifying

cyberbullying. Resembling the teenagers in Marwick and boyd's study (2014), and the challenges identified among high school populations (Menin et al., 2021; Ranney et al., 2020), while not discussing drama overtly, participants in Cassidy et al.'s (2019) study referenced how online spaces have created challenges such as distinguishing between perception and reality, differentiating between online and offline contexts, and complicating the nature of social relationships. This may explain why not all conflicts are cyberbullying, instead implying that there are other factors, such as both conditions of the conflict as well as context, to be considered before using the label cyberbullying (Cassidy et al., 2019; Mishna et al., 2018). Given the importance of these factors, and the difficulty in pinpointing a singular definition of cyberbullying, just as seen among younger populations (see Marwick & boyd, 2014; Ranney et al., 2020), it may be the case that these factors become more central to young adults understanding of cyberbullying.

To empirically evaluate how young adults understand, interpret, and experience cyberbullying, Sheanoda et al.'s (2021) research with post-secondary students revealed confusion and disagreement with academic-centred definitions of cyberbullying and mixed feelings regarding the criteria used in the cyberbullying literature among young adults. For example, cyberbullying was described as a "persistent" problem rather than an aggressive or repetitive act. Unlike criteria used by cyberbullying scholars, Sheanoda et al. (2021) also found young adults stressed the importance of considering the role of anonymity in perpetrating cyberbullying, the personal and targeted nature of cyberbullying, and the experiences of cyber victims. This lack of clarity around the term cyberbullying pertaining to young adults has left several further unanswered questions such as: How do young adults conceptualize and evaluate cyberbullying? What set of criteria do young adults use to classify cyberbullying behaviours, and what factors matter most? As a result, more research is needed that seeks to address these outstanding questions and remedy the confusion, inconsistency, and uncertainty around cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood that continues to plague the cyberbullying literature (Sheanoda et al., 2021). Doing so will provide further clarity regarding cyberbullying in the context of young adulthood, particularly leading to valuable insights into potential alternative criteria young adults use to evaluate cyberbullying. Subsequently, there is potential for these lines of inquiry to lead to clarification regarding potential differences between various types of online behaviours (Cassidy et al., 2019) and help to inform the development and implementation of more

relevant, effect, and age-appropriate cyberbullying prevention and response initiatives targeting young adults (Faucher et al., 2020; Jeffrey & Stuart, 2019).

4.3 Findings

4.3.1 References young adults draw upon that inform their understanding of cyberbullying

Before delving into young adults' evaluations of the applicability of cyberbullying criteria used in the literature and their evaluations of cyberbullying, it was important to understand young adults' perspectives of cyberbullying more broadly. Rather than being provided with a definition of cyberbullying, participants were asked to describe cyberbullying in their own words. By describing cyberbullying in their own words, variability could be captured around how different individuals understand cyberbullying as well as reveal what points of reference young adults drew upon when describing cyberbullying. These points of references refer to the influences in young adults' lives that help to inform them about cyberbullying. These points of references were important as where, how, and what types of information have been influential in shaping young adults' perspectives about cyberbullying could subsequently influence, among other things, their attitudes of and perceptions toward engagement in cyberbullying, and the perceived acceptability of cyberbullying behaviours. In addition, different points of reference could also help to explain differences between participants regarding their perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying. In this study, three points of reference were used by participants including cyberbullying-related education received throughout their earlier stages of schooling (e.g., elementary, middle, and high school), cyberbullying experiences of participants themselves and/or their friends/peers, and mediated portrayals of cyberbullying (e.g., news stories; popular films; television shows and series).

First, just over half of participants (12 participants of 21), including Yasmin Koury (W, 21), reflected on conversations around cyberbullying that occurred throughout elementary, middle, and/or high school.

> The first thing that comes to mind immediately when I hear the word cyberbullying, is literally bullying online or any sort of harassment...acting a certain way that another person doesn't like, hate toward someone online…It brings me back to middle school, grade school especially, when we first start to learn about cyberbullying.

Resembling textbook-like descriptions, cyberbullying involved being mean in some way to another person or group of people (e.g., caused harm), and occurred online such as via social media and group messenger chats.

Second, few participants (5 participants) described cyberbullying in terms of experiences of either themselves or their friends/peers. For example, Chantal O'Connor (W, 19) described an experience from when she was younger, articulating how cyberbullying manifested itself in varying ways.

> When I was little, like 12 or 13, we were in this group chat with this girl, and anytime you would say anything, or just if you said something people don't like, they would call you awful names…It almost puts you in a state of fear to even post anything for the fear that you will have someone comment something rude or talk about you behind your back, which I think, I don't know, it might not be considered cyberbullying.

When discussing these experiences, the participants talked about cyberbullying more deeply, expressing meaningful connections from these experiences to more general understandings of cyberbullying. However, for few participants (6 participants), including Chantal, it stirred confusion, which led individuals to negotiate if the behaviour(s) was, in fact, cyberbullying or if it was something else.

Third, four of the 21 participants described cyberbullying as linked to mediated portrayals of cyberbullying, such as the film *Cyberbully*, which aired when most participants were in elementary or middle school. Having memories of watching the film at home and/or school, individuals expressed the film's lasting impact and how it framed their perceptions of cyberbullying. For example, Zoe Arnott (W, 19) described the film's intensity, which alarmed her of not only what cyberbullying was, but also how serious it could be.

> Whenever I hear the word cyberbullying, I think of the movie *Cyberbully*…it's definitely the more extreme end of it, but that is the reality for a lot of people, so it's important to see, but it's also important for people to know that it's not always that intense.

Like Zoe, a couple participants (2 participants) cautioned that the film depicted cyberbullying in its most severe form, and while Zoe said that was *"the reality for a lot of people,"* it was not necessarily representative of cyberbullying more generally. Rather, behaviours and/or outcomes did not have to be as severe to be classified as cyberbullying.

Interestingly, during these initial discussions, no participant discussed cyberbullying at the post-secondary level. The lack of discussion of cyberbullying at the post-secondary level was speculated to be attributed to the perception that cyberbullying largely impacted younger age groups, which participants indicated both directly (e.g., stating how it was common to think of cyberbullying as involving children and teenagers) and indirectly (e.g., via the points of reference they drew upon when defining and discussing cyberbullying such as learning about cyberbullying in elementary school or experiencing cyberbullying as a child or teenager). Rather, the connection to cyberbullying occurring in post-secondary happened later in the interviews, with these conversations revealing key differences in participants' perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying. For example, Charlie Russo (M, 22) commented that in post-secondary, cyberbullying was more complex.

> In more of a university setting, cyberbullying is a lot more complex than what people think.

When asked why these changes occur, Ara Mok (W, 21) suggested cyberbullying evolved throughout the life course. For instance, cyberbullying among younger age groups was based on superficial or material things (i.e., toys; clothing) whereas in young adulthood, cyberbullying became more directed and targeted at the individual (i.e., insecurities; ideas).

> It's no longer like a juice box; it could be they took something more valuable...it is just different things shift.

For participants, these changes where concerning, primarily because they had the potential to lead to severe outcomes. For instance, participants discussed various mental, physical, and emotional harms that accompany cyberbullying such as social isolation, increased anxiety, depression, self-harming behaviours, and suicide. Associated with these harms were various negative and potentially long-term offline and online consequences (e.g., loss of scholarships, breakdown of social networks, career implications). Given the changes and shifts in the phenomenon of cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood, participants had to re-evaluate and renegotiate their perceptions of and how they evaluated cyberbullying behaviours in this new phase of their lives.

4.3.2 Applicability of academic-centred criteria of cyberbullying

While scholars have suggested a specific set of criteria to evaluate cyberbullying (e.g., repetition; intentional/willful; experienced harm; an imbalance of power), there remains uncertainty if the same criteria are used by young adults for evaluating cyberbullying. For

participants in this study, the short answer regarding the applicability of these criteria was that they were sometimes useful, but not necessarily indicative of or mandatory for characterizing cyberbullying.

First, 11 out of 21 participants perceived cyberbullying to be repetitious. For these individuals, even though a one-time occurrence could cause harm, it was not necessarily cyberbullying. For example, Isabelle Martin (W, 20) linked repetition to intention, suggesting cyberbullying followed a pattern; the perpetrator would target the same individual online repeatedly.

> It's kind of a very clear distinction…if I intentionally am going back to this person's Facebook page every day, and commenting mean things, and always trying to make them feel bad about themselves…it's bullying, it's got to be repeated, something that keeps happening.

However, some participants (7 participants) disagreed, saying that while cyberbullying was often repetitive, it did not have to be to use the label cyberbullying. This was because, as Sophie Torres (W, 21) said, one-off instances could, and often were, perceived as cyberbullying; it just depended on the impact and scope of harm.

> I wouldn't say [one-off incidents] are always cyberbullying…it would have to depend on the severity of the message, because even if it's a one-time thing where you're saying, "hey, this girl is a B-word," that's okay…but if you're telling someone to go kill themselves, I find the severity there definitely makes it kind of a grey area of repetitiveness.

Thus, the criterion of repetition depended on how cyberbullying affected the cyber victim as a one-off incident may be enough to push someone's boundary. In such cases, experienced harm was a better determinate of cyberbullying than repetition exclusively.

Second, while all participants agreed that intent helped classify cyberbullying, not all agreed with how. Just over half of the participants (12 participants), like Zoe Arnott (W, 19), agreed without hesitation, saying that since cyberbullies had to consciously curate cyberbullying content, it would be inexcusable to say it was not intended.

> With cyberbullying, you type it, you look it over and you press send. So, it's intentional.

Others (8 participants), however, cautioned that it was important to consider how cyberbullying may be perpetrated unintentionally. For example, Yasmin Koury (W, 21) said

cyberbullying could be unintentional, such as when disagreements somehow escalated – it may not have been one's intention to cyberbully, but an impact was still made, thus reinforcing the importance of the impact of the cyberbullying on the individual(s) targeted.

> If you're disagreeing with someone in a disrespectful manner, then [cyberbullying] could be unintentional…it still makes that impact, like the other person getting offended or hurt.

To avoid unintentionally cyberbullying another person, participants suggested that individuals should pay more attention to what they say online. Thus, like repetition, it was necessary to reconsider what intentional means when evaluating cyberbullying.

Third, just over half of participants (11 participants) agreed that an imbalance of power was useful for evaluating cyberbullying, which was illuminated when reflecting on the differences between offline bullying and cyberbullying. For example, Ara Mok (W, 21) said despite the imbalance of power looking different online, it helped to classify cyberbullying. Instead of physical characteristics, online factors adding to cyberbullies perceived levels of power included their number of friends or followers, which increased the size of the audience.

> The physical aspect doesn't really translate to online anymore because you don't have to be a taller kid or anything to write a mean message…Someone with a big following could have a lot more power than someone who has not a lot of people following them…And that could translate to power because you have a bigger platform and a bigger audience.

Further speaking to this, Eloise Abbey (W, 21) discussed how in-person dynamics, like popularity, translated online, which again, could be shown through friends' lists and/or number of followers.

> I would say follower count is a big one, because you would just feel really intimidated…Sometimes people would be like, "oh, this poor person who only has like 20 followers is saying these mean things to me, I'm gonna send my entire army of like 5,000 followers to attack this one person." That is definitely a power imbalance.

When individuals have larger friends lists or a bigger following online, they were perceived to have more power, perhaps causing them to feel more entitled to say or do things knowing there were more people who would potentially be on their side (e.g., cyber bystanders). In most cases, these large followings worked in favour of the cyberbully who could use their

online popularity to further spread cyberbullying content and encourage others to engage with it, potentially worsening the impact associated with the cyberbullying for the cyber victim. On the other hand, as Chantal O'Connor (W, 19) said, the individual targeted, who may not have as many friends online who can support them, may feel they have little to no power to stand up to those doing the cyberbullying.

> I think that often people who are victims of bullying can feel kind of powerless whereas someone who is a bully can feel very powerful…When someone feels like they have a lot of power, they just go off on a tyrannical kind of reign and they feel like they can say whatever they want. When people are powerless, they are scared to stand up…If people were standing up, then they would discourage the bully.

Some participants (8 participants), however, were less confident that an imbalance of power was as easily recognizable in cases of cyberbullying. For example, Louis Beaumont (M, 20) said with physical factors omitted, and cyberbullies taking advantage of online features and affordances (e.g., aliases; fake accounts; anonymity), the power imbalance looked differently online. For cyberbullying, the imbalance of power was no longer seen through physical aspects, rather it was more of a social imbalance.

> The imbalance of power is kind of lessened with cyberbullying…Like you can't physically dominate somebody online, so I think there's still definitely a social imbalance usually, but, because people can hide behind an online persona, I think it kind of levels the playfield a little bit.

Like Louis stated, with the potential for cyberbullies to hide their identities online, this social imbalance was particularly hard to identify. Thus, digital spaces complicate there being a recognizable power imbalance, making it difficult for participants to confidently say this criterion was mandatory for classifying cyberbullying.

Finally, participants unanimously agreed experienced harm was key in evaluations of cyberbullying, particularly the outcomes associated with experiencing cyberbullying. The main reasons participants felt strongly about this criterion was because it was unknown what could be triggering for cyber victims. This was particularly true and especially important when considering the added stress associated with post-secondary (e.g., living with roommates; fitting in with new friend groups; increased workload) as these stressors could exacerbate cybervictimization. For example, Farrah Hassan (W, 21) described how the

impacts of cyberbullying could be harmful, and possibly become dangerous (e.g., self-harm; suicide), given that it was hard to know someone else's circumstances.

> The impacts of cyberbullying can be very harmful and dangerous for both people involved because you don't know where people are at in their life. They could be at a very low place...it could become detrimental to one's life…There is a lot of harms and dangers that could come from cyberbullying.

As Farrah suggests, it was hard to know what could set someone over the edge, and one comment could be enough to push that boundary, leading to detrimental outcomes for those targeted.

Overall, of the academic-centred criteria posited in the literature, not all were deemed to useful when describing cyberbullying. The only one criterion participants agreed on that helped to describe cyberbullying was experienced harm. This was because, as participants identified, all cyberbullying carried some sort of impact for the individual targeted. Regarding the other criteria (e.g., repetition; intent; an imbalance of power), most participants agreed these criteria could potentially be useful to describe cyberbullying; however, there was variation regarding participants' interpretations of these criteria and their applicability to cyberbullying. Therefore, questions remained regarding if there were alternative criteria that could be used to better describe cyberbullying. In the next section, I expand on this discussion to identify four key dimensions participants felt more accurately described cyberbullying.

4.3.3 Characterizing cyberbullying behaviours: A spectrum and its dimensions

Given that not all academic-centred cyberbullying criteria were perceived as useful for evaluating cyberbullying, discussions with participants revealed an alternative approach: evaluating cyberbullying according to four key dimensions. These dimensions included: (1) who was involved, (2) the scope of harm, (3) the context in which the behaviour occurred, and (4) the platform on which the behaviour occurred (see Figure 4). Together, participants reflected that these dimensions helped to assess and evaluate if a behaviour was, in fact, cyberbullying.

With participants negotiating cyberbullying behaviours (e.g., what behaviours were and were not considered cyberbullying), these discussions, primarily through the dimension of the scope of harm, led to the introduction of the spectrum of severity (see Figure 5). This spectrum highlighted the level of severity or, as Louis Beaumont (M, 20) referred, *"degrees*

of escalation" of cyberbullying behaviours. This spectrum was necessary because not all behaviours perceived to be cyberbullying were deemed to be equal in level of severity even though the behaviours could be similar. Rather, once a behaviour was labelled cyberbullying, these dimensions could be reassessed to help young adults determine and justify the placement of the behaviour on the spectrum.

Figure 4. Dimensions to consider when evaluating potential cyberbullying behaviours.

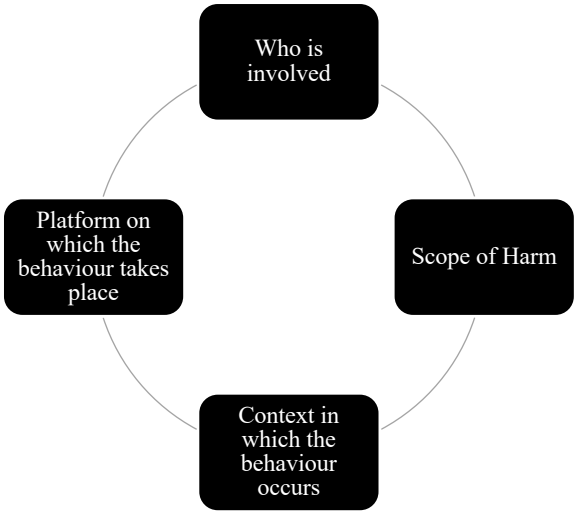
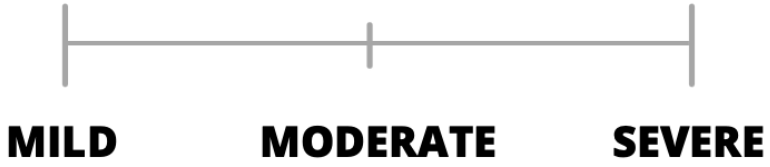


Figure 5. Spectrum of cyberbullying.



This spectrum was only general because, as Mia-Cha Kim (W, 19) cautioned, the behaviours included and where they were placed fluctuated due to cyberbullying being multi-dimensional and subjective, meaning behaviours and their level of severity could change based on varying factors (e.g., context; sensitivity of a cyber victim).

The severity of cyberbullying could drastically differ depending on the situation. However, as Zoe Arnott (W, 19) stated, even if an instance of cyberbullying was placed on the lower end of the spectrum, it was important to recognize that the behaviour was still not acceptable. A low level of severity did not lessen the experience of cyberbullying as all instances of cyberbullying, regardless of severity, were perceived to be problematic.

> None of it is okay. Just because it's on the lower end of the scale, doesn't mean it's okay.

Examining what Zoe said more closely, it was not that severity was not important. Rather, severity was only one factor of many, and it was not necessarily determinative of harm. Thus, each instance of cyberbullying needed to be contextualized rather than be generalized based on isolated factors, such as severity. What Zoe was saying, then, was that even if a behaviour was assessed by a young adult as having a low level of severity, it should not be ignored or dismissed. Regardless of the placement on the spectrum, young adults, adults like parents and educators, as well as society more generally, should be giving their attention to cyberbullying. As well, societal institutions and organizations, such as post-secondary institutions, mental health organizations, and social media companies, need to implement proper intervention and response to mitigate and remedy the harms cyber victims experience resulting from the cyberbullying. What follows is a more detailed discussion of each of the dimensions, along with the spectrum of severity, that participants referenced as better allowing them to evaluate cyberbullying.

4.3.3.1 Who was involved

First, when considering who was involved, over half of participants (15 participants) said strength of social relationships played a major factor in determining if a behaviour was perceived to be cyberbullying. With cyberbullying occurring online, and the ability for cyberbullies to take advantage of the features of digital media to conceal their identity (i.e., anonymity; creation of fake accounts; removal of geographical boundaries), participants recognized how it could be anyone doing the cyberbullying (i.e., a stranger or your closest friend). Despite this potential, most perceived cyberbullying as predominately occurring between peers and acquaintances and, albeit to a lesser extent, friends. Participants defined peers and acquaintances as those known to individuals, but who have less established social relationships with them. For example, Charlie Russo (M, 22) said in post-secondary, these were people you have met a few times, perhaps at a party or have a class with, that mostly engage in cyberbullying.

> In a university setting, a lot of the times I find its people who you met once or twice, or you have seen at a party, or you have friends that know them, a friend of a friend.

With importance placed on building one's social network in post-secondary, as Mariam Nasri (W, 19) said, individuals may add these acquaintances to their online networks. As a result,

there was potential for these so-called friends to take advantage of information that individuals shared online, using it to perpetrate cyberbullying.

> There are a lot of fake friends...you never really know who you can trust. They can obviously be a part of cyberbullying…even a person you thought was your friend, then suddenly out of nowhere, suddenly they send hateful texts, either through a person or through a fake account or something like that.

Thus, participants identified how weak social ties, perhaps acquired in different life stages (i.e., from high school) or via social outlets (i.e., parties or clubs), could become problematic, subjecting an individual to cyberbullying.

In rarer cases when cyberbullying occurred between friends, that being individuals who have close relationships, as Sophie Torres (W, 21) said, it was perceived as more impactful. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was because friends had an advantage over peers: they knew one's insecurities, secrets, personal life, and were trusted social ties. As a result, when cyberbullying occurred, it was believed to be more targeted, creating a stronger impact.

> I would say if I knew that a close friend of mine was bashing me online and making fun of me, and even texting me and harassing me, I'd be ten times more hurt than if some random, anonymous person online is doing the same thing just because there is betrayal.

Thus, not all instances of cyberbullying carry with them the same impact and, pending who was involved, coupled with the next dimension – the scope of harm – there were varying factors to consider before assessing if a behaviour was, in fact, cyberbullying.

4.3.3.2 The scope of harm

The second dimension, the scope of harm, was a major consideration for all participants, especially since cyberbullying was perceived to be worse than offline bullying. For example, Chantal O'Connor (W, 19) stated that even though cyberbullying led to no immediate physical harm, cyberbullying escalated and amplified other harms (e.g., emotional; psychological), especially since online content was more permanent, having a looming and lasting impact for those targeted.

> I think cyberbullying conflicts can escalate and cause a lot of mental and emotional harm…You have those words there for evidence, so you also have those words there to look at and stare at, it is just like burns into your brain.

Contributing to the amplification of these harms was the scope of the audience, which about half of participants (10 participants) suggested was wider in post-secondary given the increased importance of expanding one's network. For example, Kris Reid (W, 20) said a wider audience made it easier for others to get involved as audience members could contribute to the cyberbullying (i.e., comment), and potentially increase the audience even further (i.e., sharing it).

> I feel like online, it's easier for other people to get involved because everybody can see exactly what you're talking about, and then everybody else chimes in.

These harms were further exacerbated, as Maria Symanski (W, 21) stated, with individuals (e.g., peers; acquaintances; strangers) believing they could be meaner online since they were physically removed from one another, suggesting that cyberbullying perpetrators do not necessarily dwell on the potential impact of their mean behaviours.

> I guess the main thing is that you don't have that face-to-face interaction, which means you can be nastier online.

Thus, considering the scope of the harm helped young adults distinguish cyberbullying behaviours as distinct from offline bullying while further acknowledging how harms could shift (i.e., from physical to emotional) and be amplified within digital spaces.

By gauging the type and severity of harm, not all outcomes were equal. Rather, participants took into consideration three additional factors including the type of cyberbullying, the frequency, and the individual being targeted. First, as Ara Mok (W, 21) suggested, different types of cyberbullying caused different impacts, which made it necessary to consider and assess the type of harm relative to the behaviour.

> I think that there are different levels of cyberbullying…I think any type of cyberbullying is bad in general, but then I do feel like, I know there are different types of cyberbullying that could be detrimental to other people. Like I guess imitating someone and having forums to, like a hate group online about someone. That could be really bad for a person's self-esteem and mental health and all that.

Second, over half of participants (16 participants), including Emma Williams (W, 24), suggested consideration of the frequency of the cyberbullying because more frequent cyberbullying usually resulted in more of an impact.

> If it seems like it's a frequent, daily thing, it could become something more serious than if it's just someone who got really upset with this person because some big thing

> happened and it just, it was a one-day thing and never happened again. It's the frequency of the attacks that could declare the severity.

Third, because cyberbullying was perceived to be a subjective experience, few participants (6 participants) also reflected on the necessity of considering the individual targeted. For example, Anna Johnson (W, 21) said that what she may categorize as a certain level of severity was not universal.

> It would be hard to draw the line where it, I guess when it becomes unacceptable, when it is inappropriate or uncomfortable, but that line is pretty subjective.

Based on these factors, taken alongside the first dimension, participants felt they were better able to assess severity and, in turn, ensure the behaviour was, in fact, cyberbullying.

4.3.3.3 Context in which the behaviour occurred

The third dimension that most participants (18 participants) identified as important was the context in which the behaviour occurred. When discussing context, participants highlighted variations in acceptability of behaviours (e.g., inside jokes; name-calling; teasing; use of humour or sarcasm) and reinforced the importance of with whom the exchange was taking place (e.g., between friends). For instance, Chantal O'Connor (W, 19) said there were certain levels of comfort with friends to tease or insult one another. However, if the same behaviours took place with peers and/or strangers, they would be less appropriate, crossing a boundary to become cyberbullying.

> It's so common now that girls will be like, "this is my bitch…" and if I was to say that to another girl, calling her a bitch, it would not be okay...I think it has totally different meaning. Saying something like that in your friend group is often okay, but saying that to someone random is often not okay.

Such examples highlighted the acceptability to "bully" in the context of friendships, namely because friends knew one another's boundaries, though it was not perceived as *real* cyberbullying. Rather, these behaviours were classified as drama, gossip, teasing, or joking. Using these terms instead of cyberbullying better reflected how these behaviours were part of the implicit dynamics of friendships – they were normalized, mutual, and reciprocal. However, if one's boundaries were pushed too far, actual cyberbullying would occur.

Discussions of context brought conversations around the use of labels to describe different behaviours happening within varying contexts such as gossip, drama, and other forms of conflict (e.g., disagreements). However, as Charlie Russo (M, 22) suggested,

identifying the boundary between these behaviours and cyberbullying was *"a huge grey area."* For Charlie, the label cyberbullying indicated that these other types of behaviours (e.g., drama) had escalated.

> I think cyberbullying would be the next step to drama.

Thus, behaviours like gossip, drama, and conflict hover somewhere before the milder end of the spectrum. If/when they become cyberbullying, it would be necessary to reassess the behaviour relative to the dimensions identified to determine where on the spectrum the behaviour would fall. It is important to note; however, not all conflict was perceived to be cyberbullying, but all cyberbullying was conflict.

4.3.3.4 The platform on which the behaviour occurred

The final dimension that majority of participants identified (19 participants) included the platforms on which cyberbullying takes place. The reason was because cyberbullying happens on a variety of digital outlets, each bringing with them variations in what cyberbullying looks like as well as levels of severity. Though a limited number of participants referred to cyberbullying occurring in the comment sections of news articles and blogs, the focus was primarily on social media platforms. While participants discussed an array of social media platforms, such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, with some mentioning Facebook, Twitter, and to a lesser extent, Reddit and LinkedIn, there was little agreement on which platform(s) cyberbullying happened most often. Rather, participants focused on the features and tools these platforms afforded their users and how these could be taken advantage of to perpetrate cyberbullying. For instance, Sophie Torres (W, 21) discussed differences between public (e.g., public profiles; comment sections) and private (e.g., direct messages; exclusive group chats) features.

> For example, with Snapchat, you can post stuff on your stories as well as at the same time messaging them, so I'd say anything you can message that person while also [cyber]bullying them in front of groups of many others…That's where you can kind of get the best of both worlds if you're the bully.

On one hand, some participants expressed stronger attitudes that cyberbullying more commonly took place via group/messenger chats and direct messages, which were more exclusive and less public. These spaces were perceived to be simultaneously more (e.g., controlling who was included) and less (e.g., saying whatever they wish without intervention) regulated, both of which made it easier for individuals to cyberbully, believing

there would be few, if any, repercussions. For example, Louis Beaumont (M, 20) had witnessed cyberbullying happening in group chats, suggesting these situations easily created a "*mob mentality*" because individuals felt more comfortable expressing harmful ideas, thoughts, and comments they may not have posted publicly or have ever said in-person – a phenomenon known as online disinhibition.

> You think only those people are going to see it, so you might feel comfortable saying something unsavory that you wouldn't to a wider audience…A big component is the exclusivity of the group chats, like you're not going to come into contact with anybody who is going to tell you off. It's often made up of like-minded people…Everybody just kind of fuels each other in this kind of mob mentality situation.

Thus, these private avenues were perceived as fostering the acceptability of meanness and ultimately, cyberbullying.

On the other hand, other participants believed this freedom and lack of regulation was characteristic of the social media more generally, whether engaging publicly or privately. When engaging in cyberbullying more publicly, as Eloise Abbey (W, 21) explained, platforms were perceived to be more open, allowing a wider audience comprised of a range of digital users to engage with the cyberbullying content. This amplified the scope and impact of the cyberbullying.

> I think people online are much more likely to pick a side, and that can result in ganging up on one person…when you have 200 people saying the same comment, it's obviously, how do you expect that person to not become really overwhelmed with what's going on?

Thus, considering the platforms where cyberbullying happens, participants recognized not only the many ways cyberbullying could occur, but also alluded to potential features and tools taken advantage of by cyberbullies. Taken together, participants used the dimensions they identified to not only more confidently assess if the behaviour should be characterized as cyberbullying, but also to determine where on the spectrum the behaviour would fall.

4.4 Discussion

Despite the disproportionate attention paid to younger age groups within the cyberbullying literature, an emerging body of work has sought to better understand cyberbullying relative to young adulthood, typically paying attention to experiences of post-secondary students (e.g.,

Cassidy et al., 2019; Mishna et al., 2018). As of recent, Sheanoda et al. (2021) extended this body of work, investigating young adults' conceptualizations of the term cyberbullying. With their findings suggesting confusion and discrepancies between academic-centred definitions and criteria used to evaluate cyberbullying compared to the perspectives of young adults, this study sought to extend these investigations, furthering our understanding of cyberbullying, and providing a potential alterative set of criteria used by young adults to classify it.

Findings revealed young adults drew from three central reference points when asked their perspectives and opinions regarding cyberbullying. Given that there were some parallels to how cyberbullying has been conceptualized within the literature, such as that cyberbullying occurs via digital media and causes harm, often deliberately (i.e., signifying possible intent), it was important to tease out these perspectives further to investigate the applicability of academic-centred criteria (e.g., repetition; intentional/willful; experienced harm; an imbalance of power) to cyberbullying at the post-secondary level. According to the young adults in this study, these criteria can be useful, but were not necessarily mandatory for determining cyberbullying behaviours. Resulting from young adults' dissatisfaction with academic-centred criteria for evaluating cyberbullying, and is the central contribution of this work, an alternative approach is offered, which is evaluating cyberbullying according to four key dimensions. These dimensions included: (1) who was involved, (2) the scope of harm, (3) the context in which the behaviour occurred, and (4) the platform on which the behaviour occurred. Using these dimensions, young adults felt as though that could more confidently evaluate cyberbullying, subsequently helping them to distinguish cyberbullying from other behaviours such as gossip, drama, and other forms of interpersonal conflict that share overlapping characteristics (e.g., Marwick & boyd, 2014). Once a behaviour was determined to be cyberbullying, these dimensions could be reassessed to determine the behaviour's corresponding level of severity (refer back to Figure 4). These findings indicate potential links to evidence that has investigated the perspectives of adolescent high school samples where research has revealed this age group also problematizes certain cyberbullying criteria laid out in the academic literature (see Cuadrado-Gordillo & Fernandez-Antelo, 2016), suggesting problems in their application given that cyberbullying depends on certain factors, such with whom the online conflict occurs and the experiences and outcomes faced by cyber victims (see Marwick & boyd, 2014; Steer, Betts, Baguley, & Binder, 2020). However, more research is needed to make comparisons across these groups to corroborate similarities and

identify divergences. Such research would lend to meaningful insights regarding how and what ways young people's perspectives and evaluations of cyberbullying shift and change – or potentially stay the same – over the life course.

Going forward, to understand, evaluate, and assess cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood, scholars ought to further reflect on cyberbullying as a spectrum, positing cyberbullying behaviours according to a particular set of dimensions. These are important lines of future inquiry because by using the spectrum and its dimensions, it could potentially negate the challenges associated with and/or pressure of attempting to pinpoint a standard definition of cyberbullying – a challenge that has been longstanding within the literature (Alipan, Skues, Theiler, & Wise, 2019) – as well as remedy challenges associated with measuring, operationalizing, and capturing cyberbullying (see Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). It is important to note, however, that more research is needed to further develop, tease out, and assess the cyberbullying spectrum along with the dimensions. Specifically, researchers should seek to evaluate the importance of the dimensions identified in this work (i.e., which dimensions matter more than others) and if there are any additional or potential alternative dimensions young adults' use. These investigations are necessary because, as evidence has shown in this study and elsewhere (e.g., Sheanoda et al., 2021), cyberbullying in its current form is not appropriate for young adults.

Two limitations of this work should be noted. First, this study consisted of a small sample of upper-year post-secondary students from only one institution. Future research ought to consider post-secondary student perspectives of cyberbullying more broadly, obtaining a sample across years of study, including post-graduate students, as these investigations would lead to more fruitful insights into life course variations of cyberbullying as well as potentially signal different or reaffirm factors or dimensions that ought to be considered when evaluating cyberbullying behaviours. Second, the sample lacked diversity in terms of gender and race/ethnicity. Future research ought to seek to garner more diverse samples including, but not limited to BIPOC individuals and members of the LGBTQ+ community, as these students are at heightened risk of experiencing cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020). This is important as their perceptions could offer meaningful insights not yet fully acknowledged within the literature as well as diversify perceptions and evaluation of cyberbullying.

In contrast to the way scholars have conceptualized and evaluated cyberbullying, young adults consider a wider degree of variability when characterizing cyberbullying, indicating cyberbullying is situation and context dependent and should be evaluated as such. Rather than pinpointing a singular definition of cyberbullying, which was not necessarily important for young adults, cyberbullying ought to be evaluated according to a set of key dimensions as doing so gave young adults more clarity and assurance that the behaviour should be labelled as such. Although there are similarities between cyberbullying and other forms of interpersonal conflict, as suggested in the work of Marwick and boyd (2014), the young adults in this study used a spectrum and its corresponding dimensions to distinguish cyberbullying behaviours and their levels of severity. Given these differences, it is important for cyberbullying researchers to prioritize facilitating young adults' perspectives regarding cyberbullying as young adults' perspectives remain overlooked within the literature, yet young adults have lots to say whereby their insights are meaningful and provide hope for the future (Sheanoda et al., 2021). Until there is a more appropriate and robust understanding of cyberbullying and the criteria used to evaluate, conversations around cyberbullying in the phase of young adulthood must persist. Expanding this body of work is necessary for policy and resource development, which is much needed at the post-secondary level as there remains few cyberbullying initiatives targeting young adults given the uncertainty around their perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying (Faucher et al., 2020; Jeffrey & Stuart, 2019; Vaill, 2021).

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5. "*We just got to do it better somehow*": University student's perspectives of the resources for and barriers to addressing cyberbullying at the post-secondary level

5.1 Introduction

Cyberbullying, defined as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through computers, cellphones, and other electronic devices" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015, p. 11), impacts individuals in various stages of the life course (Myers & Cowie, 2019; PREVNet, 2019), particularly children, adolescents, and young adults as they spend more time online for many more purposes such as socialization, free time, and education (Perrin & Atske, 2021). This increased time spent online has been found to both increase the prevalence of cyberbullying (Giumetti & Kowalski, 2022) and exacerbate outcomes associated with cyberbullying experiences (Yoon & Koo, 2020). However, cyberbullying does not impact individuals equally (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012). Rather, scholars have found variations in cyberbullying-related outcomes at different life stages (Cowie & Myers, 2016; Myers & Cowie, 2019). For instance, consequences associated with cyberbullying occurring in childhood and adolescence include increased loneliness, lack of acceptance by peers, low self-esteem, self-harming behaviours, and even suicide (Beran, Mishna, McInroy, & Shariff, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2019). In comparison, cyberbullying in young adulthood evolves and escalates (e.g., more targeted and directed behaviours) (Myers & Cowie, 2017, 2019), and has more intense, severe, and immediate negative lifelong repercussions such as irreversible personal, social, and professional consequences (e.g., damaging reputations; professional repercussions; mental health impacts) (see Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2019; Mishna et al., 2018). These outcomes are further exacerbated for young adults attending post-secondary who also deal with transition-related stressors (e.g., being away from home; negotiating their identities; changing social relationships) (Akcil, 2018; Cunningham et al., 2015).

Given the potential negative outcomes associated with cyberbullying for young adults, Faucher et al. (2020) suggest that post-secondary institutions need to make addressing cyberbullying a priority. This is because unlike younger age groups, such as those in the K-12 school system, there are very few, if any, cyberbullying-specific initiatives for prevention, response, and education at the post-secondary level (Faucher et al., 2020). Rather, a majority of post-secondary institutions fail to address cyberbullying (Vaill, 2021; Yoon & Koo, 2020). Vaill (2021) argues that post-secondary institutions are not upholding their duty of care to

students because upholding this duty requires universities to "take a firm stance on [cyber]bullying and ensure students know how to identify and report bullying and trust their universities to believe and support them when bullying does occur." Without resources or other initiatives for students to utilize should they or someone they know be cyberbullied (Faucher et al., 2020; Viall, 2021), young adults may be fearful, embarrassed, or ashamed to come forward, thinking they will not be believed or given access to the proper resources (Cassidy et al., 2019; Faucher et al., 2014). Thus, young adults may feel that they need to deal with cyberbullying-related matters on their own (Wozencroft, Campbell, Orel, Kimpton, & Leong, 2015).

To mitigate these problems, post-secondary institutions need to engage in more conversations centring on cyberbullying and its impacts on young adults (Cassidy et al., 2019) as well as solutions for prevention and response (Faucher et al., 2020). Instead of recycling versions of cyberbullying initiatives targeting younger age groups (see Bauman & Bellmore, 2015; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014), new prevention and response initiatives are needed that are context-specific and age-appropriate (Jackson et al., 2019; Faucher et al., 2020). These initiatives should also be rooted in young adults' understandings of cyberbullying (Sheanoda, Bussey, & Jones, 2021). Therefore, coinciding with broader societal shifts giving young people a voice in terms of policy development (see Their World, 2021; United Nations, 2018), young adults' perspectives are needed regarding how to address cyberbullying, as doing so will help to ensure cyberbullying initiatives are better informed, usable, and more appropriately apply to young adults (Jackson et al., 2019; Vaill, 2021).

While recent research by Faucher et al. (2020) opened the conversation around cyberbullying solutions that draw from the perspectives of young adults, complexities remain around the implementation of these types of interventions such as evaluations of their effectiveness (Vaill, 2021). This is because presently, a void remains regarding post-secondary students' perceptions of how cyberbullying is currently handled by post-secondary institutions (e.g., students' awareness of on campus policies, resources, and services that relate to cyberbullying) (Vaill, Campbell, & Whiteford, 2021). Therefore, this study interviews young adults to uncover their perspectives and opinions about what cyberbullying resources are available on campus as well as if there are any barriers (e.g., awareness, usability, and accessibility of resources and services) around them and, if so, how we

overcome them. This investigation will help to reveal how and in what areas post-secondary institutions can make improvements to better address cyberbullying (Vaill et al., 2021).

The present paper begins with a review of the literature discussing current evidence centred on cyberbullying prevention and response initiatives at the post-secondary level. Next, using data collected from semi-structured interviews with 21 second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduate students (see Chapter 3), I present the findings. Here, it is demonstrated that post-secondary students perceive cyberbullying to be a prevalent and concerning, yet largely ignored problem by their institution. According to young adults, overlooking cyberbullying was attributed to the void in conversations around cyberbullying at the post-secondary level, limited knowledge about digital technologies and the impact of cyberbullying for young adults, and the stigma associated with being cyberbullying as a young adult. To address these barriers, I discuss participants' suggestions for both small- and large-scale resources and initiatives to address cyberbullying. Taken together, addressing these barriers is a critical step toward cyberbullying being taken seriously by post-secondary institutions, as well as society more broadly, which can then lead to the implementation of more effective resources and initiatives that address cyberbullying. To conclude, I discuss the contributions derived from this work, study limitations, and suggestions for future research.

5.2 Literature Review

5.2.1 Cyberbullying initiatives at the post-secondary level

5.2.1.1 Cyberbullying prevention initiatives

Several solutions have been offered for how post-secondary institutions could implement cyberbullying initiatives. For instance, some have suggested that institutions could offer anonymous cyberbullying reporting systems (Cunningham et al., 2015; Langos & Giancaspro, 2019). These systems would help to address the underreporting of cyberbullying that takes place at post-secondary, subsequently indicating cyberbullying prevalence rates (Wozencroft et al., 2015), as well as remedy student concerns of not knowing where to go to or if they can report cyberbullying (Faucher et al., 2014). However, these reporting systems would only be effective if institutions have plans in place to address, remedy, and respond to received reports (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2013).

In a more recent study centring on amplifying post-secondary students' voices in terms of cyberbullying solutions at the post-secondary level, Faucher et al. (2020) revealed that cyberbullying solutions ought to combine the individual, post-secondary institutions, and

the digital context (e.g., role of social media platforms; use of digital features and affordances) to address and mitigate cyberbullying. For example, students felt that their institutions should be taking active roles in providing students with updated information to increase their awareness of and continually be educated on cyberbullying. As well, part of the institution's role was to implement policy for addressing cyberbullying, which would ensure there were sanctions for cyberbullying perpetrators. At the individual level, students felt digital media users needed to take responsibility to secure their online accounts, protect their privacy, and be mindful of what they post online, all of which could potentially mitigate being targeted by cyberbullying. Finally, the students also referenced technology-based solutions that heavily centred on the digital context for preventing and responding to cyberbullying. These solutions included increasing awareness of the use of mechanisms for blocking and reporting as well as the need for moderators of online accounts affiliated with the institution to intervene in cyberbullying.

One key element laced across studies of cyberbullying prevention is education (e.g., what cyberbullying is; how to recognize cyberbullying) that targets both students as well as individuals working and volunteering on campus (i.e., residence life staff; faculty) (Langos & Giancaspro, 2019). By increasing cyberbullying-related education, post-secondary institutions would take greater strides in creating an anti-cyberbullying culture because individuals would, for example, better understand the outcomes associated with cyberbullying and/or be better equipped to intervene (Faucher et al., 2020; Mishna et al., 2018). In cases where cyberbullying-focused education programs have been implemented, scholars have found them to be effective and promising. For example, at one Japanese institution, first-year post-secondary students are enrolled in mandatory courses geared toward discussing cyberbullying (e.g., Internet Morality Education), which, when coupled with other initiatives (e.g., peer-based mentoring), has resulted in a more positive campus climate (Kanayama & Kurihara, 2019). Further, evaluating the healthy campus community initiative implemented by a Canadian institution, Black (2019) found students were more aware of cyberbullying's impact on well-being. This awareness has helped garner a more positive and supportive environment where students are more knowledgeable, aware, and connected. However, these types of initiatives are not widespread.

5.2.1.2 Implementing cyberbullying policies

Moving from prevention to response, while cyberbullying scholars agree initiatives are needed that target cyberbullying at the post-secondary level, debates persist regarding what types of initiatives would be best. Looking first at policy, early research papers have called for zero-tolerance policies (see Minor, Smith, & Brashen, 2013). However, these types of policies have been critiqued as too broad (Faucher et al., 2020) and, as found in their application to cyberbullying among younger age groups (see Fox, 2016), zero-tolerance policies are ill-effective for combating the problems they were put in place to address. Alternatively, Faucher et al. (2014) propose revising existing post-secondary policies, such as student codes of conduct or harassment and discrimination policies, to include cyberbullying. However, closer investigations into these policies and their potential application to cyberbullying, reveal various problems such as uncertainty regarding where and how cyberbullying could fit within these policies (e.g., lack of definitions and scope of behaviours) (Faucher et al., 2015) and contradictions between policies (Vaill, 2021).

Alternatively, rather than using existing institutional policies, others have suggested applying broader legal frameworks to cyberbullying behaviours, which could provide institutions with more formalized procedures and laws as well as potentially alleviate jurisdictional challenges faced when handling cases of cyberbullying (see Condeza, Gallardo, & Reyes Perez, 2019; Langos & Giancasparo, 2019). In fact, Faucher et al. (2015) found that a few Canadian post-secondary institutions were already doing this by applying and/or citing the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Criminal Code of Canada, and the Human Rights Act. However, Deschamps and McNutt (2016) caution that since cyberbullying is not always a criminal offence, these frameworks may not always apply.

Despite the potential promise of implementing legislation for addressing cyberbullying, several challenges have been pointed out regarding their appropriateness and application. First, a central concern has been the failure to define cyberbullying and how it ought to be evaluated (Faucher et al., 2015). Given the complexity associated with understanding cyberbullying at varying stages of the life course (Myers & Cowie, 2019), it is often difficult to pinpoint one single definition or set of criteria (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015; Sheanoda et al., 2021) as well as whose perspectives should be given priority when determining such policies (Kota et al., 2014). Therefore, before implementing any policy in

the post-secondary context, we need a better understanding of how cyberbullying is conceptualized by young adults.

Second, regarding the enforceability of these pieces of legislation, questions remain as to how these laws can work to regulate cyberbullying behaviours (Jackson et al., 2019). For example, with cyberbullying happening online, it is often difficult to discern and measure cyberbullying outcomes (e.g., evaluate harm caused), especially since cyberbullying can remain undetected (e.g., anonymity; via private chats) (Deschamps & McNutt, 2016). Even before they are enforced, however, young people need to be made aware of and educated on applicable legislation (Jones & Scott, 2012). Additionally, there needs to be clearly laid out plans, strategies, and protocols for young people to come forward with as well as institutions for handling cyberbullying concerns (Faucher et al., 2020). Ongoing evaluations are also necessary to ensure that laws and policies remain relevant and adequate for handling cyberbullying (Jones & Scott, 2012), especially since cyberbullying evolves and changes (Bauman & Bellmore, 2015).

Third, when implementing policy-focused consequences, Hudson (2020) suggests being mindful of protections around freedom of speech. This is because there are often unclear boundaries between where protections end and harassment begins, between objectivity and subjectivity in defining what constitutes cyberbullying, and between what constitutes a misunderstanding compared to a legitimate concern (Faucher et al., 2014). To remedy these challenges, O'Connor et al. (2018) offered several recommendations such as focusing on the impact of cyberbullying (e.g., what is said online) on cyber victims and the prevention of cyberbullying. Therefore, while it may be expected that there are consequences for cyberbullying behaviours, given that post-secondary students are at an age where they assume greater responsibility for their actions (Faucher et al., 2015), there is great complexity when it comes to implementing and enforcing policies for handling cyberbullying.

5.2.2 Prevailing gap in the literature: More engagement with young adults' perspectives

Despite potential progress made among institutions that have implemented cyberbullying initiatives, both in terms of prevention and response, concerns persist that these initiatives are not necessarily rooted in the perspectives of students whom these initiatives target (Faucher et al., 2020). Such perspectives are needed because not only are students a key stakeholder group who should be given autonomy and control (Cunningham et al., 2015), but their insights could help to ensure solutions are better informed, relatable, and age-appropriate (see

Jackson et al., 2019; Vaill, 2021). Despite this potential, there remains a dearth of research uncovering post-secondary students' perspectives regarding how post-secondary institutions can best handle cyberbullying. Rather, studies have examined the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as post-secondary staff, faculty, or administrators (see Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2017), evaluated initiatives already in place and/or student's awareness and use of them (see Faucher et al., 2019; Langos & Giancaspro, 2019), or drawn conclusions regarding solutions based on broader work investigating cyberbullying occurring at the post-secondary level (see Mishna et al., 2018; Wright, 2018).

While Faucher et al.'s (2020) work has led to meaningful insights regarding solutions to cyberbullying rooted in the perspectives of a key stakeholder group – post-secondary students – who are often overlooked in the cyberbullying literature, complexities remain around the implementation of such solutions. For example, Vaill (2021) suggests we know little about young adults' perceptions of how cyberbullying is currently handled by post-secondary institutions as well as students' awareness of on campus policies, resources, and/or the services universities provide to handle concerns of cyberbullying. Thus, before implementing potential solutions targeting cyberbullying, more research is needed that evaluates students' perspectives of cyberbullying more generally and how cyberbullying is presently handled by their institutions more specifically. Doing so will help to reveal potential problems or barriers associated with addressing cyberbullying, such as how and in what areas universities can make improvements (Vaill et al., 2021). This can lead to further insight regarding how to overcome these challenges to better address cyberbullying at the post-secondary level in ways that would make a difference.

5.3 Findings

5.3.1 Lack of existing resources on campus for addressing cyberbullying

When asked about their awareness of on campus policies and/or resources related to cyberbullying, the majority of participants (19 participants) stated they were not aware of any institutional policies or resources available on campus addressing cyberbullying. Demonstrating this void, Becky Chan (W, 21) said if she needed help or support to deal with cyberbullying, she was unaware of any on campus resources that could be utilized.

> If I were to be a target of cyberbullying, and feel like I need that help, that support, and how one might respond to a cyberbully or how to handle that situation, I don't really know any resources on campus for that.

Of the remaining two participants, one speculated the possibility of the student code of conduct offering guidance if cyberbullying occurred, while the other, Alexis Anderson (W, 19), assumed that the university had a zero-tolerance policy.

> I've never heard of [resources] specifically for cyberbullying…I am sure it is like a no tolerance policy kind of thing.

In fact, ahead of undertaking this work, I personally investigated potential on campus policies, resources, and services pertaining to cyberbullying to see what types of initiatives were available on campus for students. This step was taken as a precaution in order to have knowledge of on campus policies, resources, and services should participants identify and discuss any they were aware of relating to cyberbullying. Doing so, I could probe for more deeper and nuanced conversations around these initiatives. However, as identified by participants during the interviews suggesting they were largely unaware of any on campus initiatives specific to cyberbullying, I was unsuccessful in finding any that were specific to cyberbullying.

About half of participants (10 participants) suggested that students could turn to other available on campus services (e.g., student wellness centre; student counselling; peer support) should they need cyberbullying-related support. As Farrah Hassan (W, 21) said, even though these services did not address cyberbullying directly, they were the only options students had.

> The peer support centre or student experience and stuff like that can help you get resources to get help, but I don't know how directly related they would be to cyberbullying.

While serving as potential alternatives, participants reflected that these services had their own limitations, such as excessive wait times, accessibility barriers (e.g., funding; health plans), and they lacked specialization regarding specific concerns like cyberbullying. Given these challenges, Emma Williams (W, 24) felt students may be deterred from using these services.

> [These services] may be able to support a victim of cyberbullying, kind of within mental health supports, but it's so limited, and it's so hard to reach that there's also that problem.

The lack of adequate support available was concerning for participants, indicating that students may feel they needed to handle cyberbullying and related outcomes on their own.

Taken together, the lack of cyberbullying resources offered on campus combined with limited alternative support services were major problems that needed to be addressed.

5.3.2 Barriers to addressing cyberbullying

Discussions of cyberbullying occurring at the post-secondary level more broadly, coupled with conversations around the lack of resources available to students pertaining to cyberbullying more specifically, revealed insight into larger barriers that students perceived as impacting how post-secondary institutions handled cyberbullying. Specifically, three barriers were discussed by participants, which included a lack of broader conversations around cyberbullying occurring at the post-secondary level, limited knowledge around digital technologies, cyberbullying, and their impact on young adults, and the stigma associated with being cyberbullied as a young adult. It was these barriers participants believed contributed to the lack of policies and resources on campus for addressing cyberbullying. In what follows is a detailed discussion of each of these barriers followed by potential solutions participants suggested for overcoming them.

5.3.2.1 Lack of conversations around cyberbullying at the post-secondary level

The first barrier participants identified was the void in conversations and education around cyberbullying since starting post-secondary. As a result, participants were somewhat unsurprised that there was a lack of cyberbullying policies and resources available on campus. For example, Zoe Arnott (W, 19) said she was not aware of a time she even heard the university discuss cyberbullying, let alone offer any cyberbullying resources.

> I don't think I've ever heard the university like, in an Instagram post, in an email, or even in O-Week when they're talking to us, I've never heard them say the word cyberbullying…I'd honestly wouldn't really know where to go within the university.

Echoing Zoe's comments, Yasmin Koury (W, 21) reflected on her on campus involvement as a student employee and volunteer (e.g., residence life; orientation week), stating that none of these roles have included training or resources related to cyberbullying.

> It hasn't been talked about. I've gone through Soph training, I've gone through Rez Staff training, worked at [the university] this summer for their [Student Experience Program] ...not once have we really highlighted or focused on cyberbullying.

The void of attention given to cyberbullying, signalled through the lack of conversations around it occurring at the post-secondary level, sparked concern that cyberbullying was not being taken seriously. Participants stated that this indicated to students that their institution

had failed to recognize cyberbullying as a potential problem students faced. Without any policies or resources in place, a need was left unfulfilled, leaving young adults to feel uncertain and unprepared regarding cyberbullying.

When asked about why they thought cyberbullying had been omitted from broader conversations at the post-secondary level, participants gave several potential reasons including that disproportionate attention was paid to other issues that students faced during their transition to or throughout their post-secondary career. For instance, Louis Beaumont (M, 20) said he believes cyberbullying has been forgotten about at the post-secondary level because of the many pressures and stressors that students often encounter during this period of their lives.

> [Cyberbullying] has kind of been forgotten about as we have moved to post-secondary because there's so many new pressures coming in, like the transition to university in general is quite stressful, the increased workload.

Knowing that the post-secondary transition can be quite stressful, Becky Chan (W, 21) reflected on her experience during first-year orientation week, describing how the university provided a broad range of resources to students, which alerted them of potential services available should they need them. However, participants did not recall that any of these resources were related to cyberbullying. Rather, while there were services like mental health support available to them, which could be useful for individuals experiencing cyberbullying-related outcomes, it was not made clear to students that these services dealt with cyberbullying-related concerns.

> When I was in first year, first year orientation, they give you all these numbers you can call for help and services you can go to if you encounter issues. They were mainly focusing on mental health support, counselling, therapy, also foot patrol if you were to be out late and needed someone to walk you home. I don't think any of it was specifically linked to cyberbullying.

Not including cyberbullying was problematic because, as Mariam Nasri (W, 19) said, experiencing cyberbullying coupled with transition-related stressors, could make potential cyberbullying outcomes (e.g., increased anxiety; depression; loneliness) worse, including impacts on one's academics (e.g., grades; attendance).

> Post-secondary students are already under a lot of stress and pressures…It's going to be very hard to focus on your academic priorities when there is other negative stuff bringing you down.

While post-secondary institutions provided students with a variety of potential resources and services, not making it clear to students that these resources could be useful to deal with cyberbullying, signalled to students that cyberbullying was not particularly an issue that the institution sought to address. Rather, there were other issues deemed more important by post-secondary institutions that were worth focusing on for which they provided and made students aware of a plethora of resources and services.

5.3.2.2 Limited knowledge around digital technologies and the impact of cyberbullying

The second barrier participants identified was the perception that adults, including university professors, faculty, and staff, did not fully understand digital technologies and the ramifications or outcomes associated with online behaviours, specifically cyberbullying. Just over half of participants (12 participants) referenced generational gaps where many of their professors, for example, were not tech savvy and had limited digital skills and digital knowledge, which participants felt impacted their ability to understand online behaviours like cyberbullying. For instance, Anna Johnson (W, 21) said since older generation adults did not utilize digital media the same way individuals of her generation did, it made it harder for them to know the intricacies of young adults' online activities and their online experiences.

> With it being a different time, [adults like parents and educators] don't understand technology as much as someone in my generation would. They probably don't understand as much about how [cyberbullying] could happen. They don't interact with people the same way online.

To elaborate, Charlie Russo (M, 22) said that though some older generation adults, such as his parents, may try to understand digital media, they could never truly understand it given that digital media was not as engrained into their lives as it was for young adults. This was partly because, as Charlie said, social media platforms were complex environments for young adults, and it was hard for those without innate or intimate knowledge of these spaces to truly comprehend the impacts of what happens online.

> I think that's kind of the effect of a technology society where if you have an older, say like parent, your parents are 70 something, say 60 years old, they didn't grow up in the same environment…I don't even think parents would understand what's

> actually going on because they are so unaware of the complexities of social media platforms because they're not in that environment. I mean it's such a complex environment… They don't understand what the repercussions are to social media use and stuff like that.

As a result, Ara Mok (W, 21) suggested that it was harder for older generation adults to not only understand cyberbullying, but also the outcomes associated with experiencing cyberbullying.

> [Adults like parents and educators] grew up in an era where cyberbullying wasn't really like a thing…I think they're not as aware of it as we are and…they kind of neglect the fact that cyberbullying could be a very detrimental thing that's happening in someone's life.

Without a more intimate understanding of cyberbullying and related outcomes, participants perceived it to be more difficult for adults to provide support to students who may disclose experiences of cyberbullying and/or come to them for support. Further, not understanding cyberbullying contributed to the lack of conversations being had at post-secondary level.

5.3.2.3 Stigma associated with being cyberbullied as a young adult

The third barrier participants identified was related to perceptions around cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood. Just over half of participants (13 participants) identified there to be a stigma associated with being cyberbullied more generally, but especially as a young adult. For example, Alexis Anderson (W, 19) said perceptions around cyberbullying being a phenomenon largely impacting children and adolescents could result in young adults experiencing shame or embarrassment if they were cyberbullied.

> I think there's still a barrier, a stigma around being bullied. We think it's something that happens to kids and if you get bullied, then you're still a kid kind of thing. But also, that shame aspect, like, "oh, you can't defend yourself from this person."

The reason for this was because, as some participants (7 participants) articulated, young adulthood was associated with higher levels of maturity where individuals had grown out of their childish ways, leaving more juvenile behaviours, like cyberbullying, behind them.

The narrative that cyberbullying was more juvenile, and that by young adulthood individuals should be more mature, thereby refraining from engaging in cyberbullying, was vastly problematic as participants indicated it led to the perception that cyberbullying was not as serious if/when it occurred at the post-secondary level. For Yasmin Koury (W, 21), this

was a myth as cyberbullying occurring across life stages – from childhood through young adulthood – did not decline in severity.

> I think [cyberbullying] is still as serious as it ever was. I don't think [the level of severity] decreases over time…I think it's just the way it's presented maybe changes because people are older, but the seriousness is the same, and it should be taken seriously the same way as people took it seriously in grade school.

Instead, as Zara Nazim (W, 20) said, cyberbullying may be even worse in young adulthood because the consequences associated with cyberbullying had changed. For instance, Zara said there was more at stake in young adulthood (e.g., damaged personal and professional reputation).

> In post-secondary, there is just more at stake I think for a lot of people…The content of the bullying changes and the consequences change too…You look bad to peers, you look bad to people you want to network with. It could probably follow you, making other things down the line harder.

As a result, participants believed these implications further justified and supported the need for cyberbullying initiatives to be implemented at the post-secondary level.

An additional problem about half of participants (10 participants) identified was that given the stigma around cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood, coupled with concerns that cyberbullying was not taken seriously, individuals who were being cyberbullied may feel that they needed to handle cyberbullying-related matters on their own. This was because, as Sophie Torres (W, 21) said, these individuals may be ashamed or embarrassed to come forward, ask for help, and/or disclose that they have been impacted by such a "juvenile" behaviour.

> I do know some people would likely be embarrassed to admit they are getting cyberbullied… the victim shouldn't feel like that. No matter what age you can get cyberbullied, but there definitely is that kind of embarrassment level.

Adding to this, Farrah Hassan (W, 21) discussed the stigma associated with asking for help more generally, which could be especially hard for post-secondary students given perceptions that young adults should be more independent and/or able to deal with certain matters on their own.

> In post-secondary, I think they treat you like, deal with your problem, deal with it yourself, and you should know how to do this…Victims don't realize they can do something about it.

Thus, several factors were at play that impacted young adults' willingness to potentially seek help or support. Further, without any cyberbullying resources or not knowing where on campus they could turn for help or support, young adults may be even more hesitant or reluctant to ask for help, seek support, and/or disclose cyberbullying experiences.

5.3.3 Overcoming barriers: Solutions for how post-secondary institutions can do better

To remedy these barriers, participants discussed a variety of potential solutions. First, most participants (17 participants) suggested post-secondary institutions should increase cyberbullying-related education. This was because education was viewed as a vital tool for increasing awareness of and conversations around cyberbullying in young adulthood. In the delivery of education initiatives, it was urged that education should include, but not be limited to, post-secondary students, student leaders, educators, and staff. However, to effectively reach each of these groups, different strategies were needed.

Looking first at post-secondary students, post-secondary institutions could offer immersive cyberbullying seminars, informal information sessions, and have ongoing awareness campaigns (e.g., posters; videos). Participants, including Louis Beaumont (M, 20), perceived that these types of initiatives would be useful for providing students with updated knowledge (e.g., extend cyberbullying knowledge obtained in elementary or high school) as well as increased awareness around cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood.

> General awareness would go a long way because I just have basically stopped seeing any material on cyberbullying since I've been in post-secondary…A quick crash course kind of thing to jog our memories would, that it still exists and stuff, would definitely be good.

However, few participants (4 participants), including Anna Johnson (W, 21), were skeptical about larger-scale post-secondary initiatives due to uncertainty around how to get university students to attend, participate, and ensure cyberbullying education was being widely received. To mitigate these concerns, Anna suggested targeting student leaders since they were accessible to incoming students and could disseminate information to the student body.

> It is not like in high school where they can make you go to an assembly. They can't have like 30,000 students come do something. But just making sure student leaders do it would be a good start, I think.

Given that training programs were already in place for student leaders, Yasmin Koury (W, 21) felt it would be easy to include cyberbullying within them.

> A lot of students are student leaders…incorporating [cyberbullying] into these training modules can be a step in the right direction because once students go through that training…that will automatically go into everything else that we are teaching to other students as well.

Expanding awareness and mobilizing knowledge via student leaders was a central way for post-secondary institutions to begin opening conversations around cyberbullying, signalling to students that these concerns mattered, that resources were available should they need them, and that cyberbullying would be taken seriously.

Further, to remedy the perceived generational differences between students and adults (e.g., parents; educators) regarding digital media, cyberbullying, and their impacts, just over half of participants (11 participants), including Isabelle Martin (W, 20), suggested providing digital media training and cyberbullying-specific education to those working at post-secondary institutions (e.g., professors; faculty; staff).

> I think when it comes to educators and administration at the post-secondary level, there needs to be updated information for them …I think that if the resources are available to them to understand these issues, they would be better equipped to help us when these things came up.

By expanding older generations of adults' knowledge of digital media and cyberbullying, at least for those who work on campus, participants felt more confident that university personnel would be better able to understand cyberbullying and related outcomes, engage in conversations around cyberbullying, and facilitate more supportive environments for students.

Second, few participants (4 participants) vocalized that research, such as this study, was necessary for helping to open conversations and raise awareness around cyberbullying at the post-secondary level. In these discussions, participants suggested that by increasing cyberbullying-related research, students voices would be better heard, post-secondary

institutions could gain a deeper understanding of cyberbullying occurring among students on their campuses, and they could seek out viable ways to prevent and respond to cyberbullying.

> Having more [research] because without research, we can't really make policy changes and stuff (Maria Symanski, W, 21).

These participants, such as Farrah Hassan (W, 21), also noted that should cyberbullying resources be implemented in the future, research would become a priority to ensure initiatives were continually evaluated to assess their relevance and effectiveness.

> A lot of the times people go and ask to create change or create things, and they ask for research to back up their claim, so I think having academic research to back it up would be helpful (Farrah Hassan, W, 21).

Third, all participants argued that more on campus cyberbullying-related resources were needed. These were necessary because presently, as Eloise Abbey (W, 21) said, students do not know where to go or what to do if they were being cyberbullied.

> The lack of resources of where you are supposed to go…Like you don't even know what to look up, like "I'm being cyberbullied, what do I do?"

However, as Aisha Ali (W, 19) warned, not only did post-secondary institutions need to create and implement these resources, but they needed to ensure students were aware of where and how they could access them.

> Making it all accessible in-person and online, like if I am going on campus and I see a paper…or if I am Googling it, then it should be the first things that pops up.

Like for Aisha, accessibility of resources was a prominent concern among other participants, namely because young adults knew the concern around the stigma associated with cyberbullying, and that some students may be hesitant to utilize in-person resources. To remedy these concerns, participants suggested that post-secondary institutions should offer resources and support both on campus (e.g., physical flyers; displays) as well as online (e.g., campus websites; online support services). For example, Mariam Nasri (W, 19) suggested having an anonymized, online support service would likely help students to reach out.

> A lot of the time people ignore it thinking you're older, you can take care of it…So, I think the biggest thing [post-secondary institutions] can do is create a better response, have more resources for people to speak out, even if it is anonymously.

In some cases, offering cyberbullying resources would involve expanding current on campus support services, such as mental health services or student wellness programs, by

incorporating cyberbullying within their repertoires. By offering online alternatives, post-secondary students would be able to obtain support without fear, embarrassment, or potential judgment. As well, students could be empowered to obtain support on their own terms.

While many of these solutions pertained to post-secondary campuses, participants also recognized that post-secondary institutions did not bare the entire burden for preventing and responding to cyberbullying occurring among young adults. Rather, as Louis Beaumont (M, 20) suggested, it takes a networked response to deal with and address cyberbullying.

> I think it is kind of society's collective responsibility to realize that it's happening, and to think about ways to stop it from happening.

Addressing narratives around cyberbullying, for example, requires larger-scale initiatives that are aimed at changing a broader collective consciousness. For instance, at the societal-level, conversations around cyberbullying, particularly occurring in young adulthood, needed to be continuous and ongoing. This was particularly necessary since, as Farrah Hassan (W, 21) said, cyberbullying will always persist in some form given the pervasiveness of digital technologies in young adults' lives.

> [Cyberbullying] is going to continue to happen. There are going to be different ways, different things that come, different technologies, but it's not a conversation that is going to end, it's always going to be present in society, so society needs to keep being aware, to keep talking about it, keeping makes changes, and educating one another.

Until these broader shifts regarding cyberbullying were to come to fruition, however, a good starting point were changes being made at the post-secondary level. Thus, participants felt post-secondary institutions needed to assume some responsibility in dealing with the cyberbullying that occurs among post-secondary students as doing so could set a strong precedence for the treatment of cyberbullying, subsequently leading to much needed larger-scale changes.

5.4 Discussion

Cyberbullying occurring at the post-secondary level continues to be a prevalent (Mishna et al., 2018; Myers & Cowie, 2019), yet overlooked problem faced by post-secondary students (Faucher et al., 2020; Vaill, 2021). The concern associated with overlooking cyberbullying is that post-secondary institutions are not upholding their duty of care to students (Vaill, 2021). While work by Faucher et al. (2020) provides potential solutions for addressing cyberbullying in terms of prevention and response, there remains uncertainty if these

initiatives are enough to remedy students concerns around and address challenges associated with cyberbullying at the post-secondary level. This is because research has not yet uncovered young adults' perspectives and opinions about what cyberbullying resources are available to them on campus as well as if there are any problems or barriers around these resources and, if so, how we overcome them. Thus, the aim of this work was to address this oversight, which has subsequently helped to reveal how and in what areas post-secondary institutions can make improvements to better address cyberbullying.

As identified in this research, there needs to be a broader shift in the narrative regarding cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood at the post-secondary level. This is because current initiatives are not necessarily rooted in the perspectives of young adults, leaving questions around the types of cyberbullying initiatives implemented by post-secondary institutions and their effectiveness. Therefore, this research adds to the cyberbullying literature, specifically investigations into cyberbullying at the post-secondary level, by identifying and providing solutions for remedying and repairing the underlying barriers associated with cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood. As perceived by the participants in this study, these barriers indicate deeply rooted challenges associated with perceptions around cyberbullying, which are concerning to young adults, and help to explain why post-secondary institutions may overlook cyberbullying as a pervasive problem affecting students on their campuses. By actively working to address these barriers, such as by implementing cyberbullying-focused prevention and response initiatives like cyberbullying policies and resources, post-secondary institutions will begin to show students that cyberbullying is being taken seriously. These types of institutional-level changes have the potential to lead to larger-scale shifts on a societal-level where cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood becomes part of broader conversations around cyberbullying, potentially leading to more policies, resources, and services in place to prevent and respond to cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood.

The present study has two limitations. First, the sample consists of a small number of second-, third-, and fourth-year post-secondary students representing only the perspectives of students from one institution. Future research should work toward uncovering student perspectives across a broader age range (e.g., across all years of study; post-graduate students), across campuses, and cross-culturally to engage in comparisons within and between groups. As well, scholars should focus on obtaining large-scale data (e.g., via

surveys) that corroborates and evaluates the barriers and solutions identified in this work as well as seek to uncover additional barriers and potential alternative solutions. Second, while efforts were made to recruit a diverse range of undergraduate students, the sample was dominated by the perspectives of women (see Barlow & Cromer, 2006; McCray, King, & Bailly, 2005). Despite evidence indicating women are disproportionately targets of cyberbullying (Choi & Lee, 2017; Sobba, Paez, & ten Bensel, 2017), future research ought to be conducted that draws from more diverse samples, especially since there is a growing body of evidence indicating students from minority groups (e.g., racialized individuals; LGBTQ+ students; students with disabilities) are at heightened risk of being cyberbullied (Abreu & Kenny, 2018; Hinduja & Patchin, 2020). Drawing from more diverse samples will give insight into variations regarding cyberbullying experiences and outcomes as well as unique challenges impacting different groups. Knowing that cyberbullying prevention and response strategies are not effective when using a blanket approach, obtaining students' perspectives from diverse groups can reveal insight into better-tailored strategies for cyberbullying prevention and response by more appropriately applying to them and their experiences (Abreu & Kenny, 2018; DeSmet et al., 2018).

Overall, while cyberbullying has no standardized solution, it does require attention as it is a problem that has been omitted from conversations at the post-secondary level for far too long (Cassidy et al., 2019; Vaill, 2021). Going forward, post-secondary institutions ought to work toward reconsidering cyberbullying occurring among their student body and remedy the critical barriers that students perceive as impacting the development and implementation of much needed cyberbullying resources. By normalizing conversations around cyberbullying, addressing generational knowledge gaps regarding digital media and cyberbullying, increasing awareness of cyberbullying and the outcomes faced by those targeted, and developing and implementing viable cyberbullying-focused initiatives, for both prevention and response, post-secondary institutions can begin to pave the way to changing the narrative, highlighting to students that cyberbullying is a matter that is, and should be, taken seriously. More broadly, narratives need to change to prioritize understanding cyberbullying as an issue impacting young adults (Alipan, Skues, & Theiler, 2018; Balakrishnan & Fernandez, 2018). Even though cyberbullying is not the sole responsibility of post-secondary institutions, as it is a problem requiring the attention of society more generally (Cassidy et al., 2019), post-secondary institutions are ripe spaces for targeting

cyberbullying, and could be springboards for addressing cyberbullying among young adulthood more generally. However, until these changes happen, cyberbullying will continue to slip through the cracks. As Eloise Abbey (W, 21) said, "*we just got to do it better somehow*."

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6. Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The goals of this dissertation were to extend the cyberbullying literature in three central ways. First, to remedy the lack of theoretical engagement within cyberbullying scholarship (McMahon, 2014), and to provide a theoretical model akin to the promising model developed for traditional, offline bullying (see Swearer & Espelage, 2004), I built the social-ecological model of cyberbullying. The social-ecological model of cyberbullying uses cyberbullying evidence to highlight the complex interplay between social and digital factors influencing the occurrence of cyberbullying. In particular, the model attempts to account for cyberbullying among youth, comprised of children, adolescents, and young adults under the age of 25 (United Nations, 2020) as they are found to be most involved in cyberbullying (Anderson, 2018; Hinduja & Patchin, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2016).

Second, to extend investigations of cyberbullying in young adulthood, I investigated post-secondary students' perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying, assessed their awareness of how cyberbullying is presently handled by their post-secondary institution (e.g., what resources, if any, exist to deal with cyberbullying), and uncovered students' perspectives on potential barriers impacting the implementations of cyberbullying initiatives at the post-secondary level. Investigations into post-secondary students' perspectives are critical as this age group been overlooked in the cyberbullying literature (Faucher, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2015; Myers & Cowie, 2019).

Third, there have been discrepancies reported in the ways cyberbullying is operationalized and evaluated in studies of young adults (see Sheanoda, Bussey, & Jones, 2021), suggesting the need for a re-conceptualization of how and in what ways cyberbullying is understood and against what criteria cyberbullying ought to be evaluated in the context of young adulthood. The present work answered scholarly calls to solicit young adults' points of view in hope of informing better, more effective, and age-appropriate cyberbullying initiatives on post-secondary campuses (Faucher, Cassidy, & Jackson, 2020; Jeffrey & Stuart, 2019; Vaill, 2021).

In this concluding chapter, I begin by elaborating on the goals of this work and reviewing the objectives and findings from the research chapters. In the discussion of each chapter, I highlight the significance of each study, as well as the broader implications of

these works. Next, I elaborate on the contributions of this research. Finally, I conclude by discussing the limitations of this work and recommend topics for future research.

6.2 Research objectives and summary of research findings

6.2.1 Objective 1: Building the social-ecological model of cyberbullying

The first objective of this dissertation was to build the social-ecological model of cyberbullying. The need for this model stems from the concern that cyberbullying has been an undertheorized phenomenon, mainly because scholars have failed to fully consider the digital context in which cyberbullying occurs (McMahon, 2014). With the advent of and rise in use of digital media, especially by younger generations (Perrin & Atske, 2021), the digital greatly intersects with the social. Since cyberbullying is a digital phenomenon, to better and more comprehensively and systematically understand cyberbullying, we must simultaneously consider the digital context along with individual and other prominent contexts such as familial, peer, societal, and broader cultural influences (Tanrikulu, 2015). To do this, the present model uses the cyberbullying literature to fully integrate the digital context within each ecological system of the original ecological model (e.g., individual level, micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-systems) as well as adds the digital context as an additional system, which is separate from yet interconnected with the other systems (refer to chapter 2).

Beginning with the individual level, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying considers an individual's access to and use of digital media, their level of digital skill, digital management strategies, and digital education about and awareness of cyberbullying. The microsystem considers influences of three distinct groups (e.g., parents/family, friends/peers, and educators) on individuals' attitudes toward and perceptions of digital media and cyberbullying. In the mesosystem, the model requires consideration of the potential (in)congruence between microsystem groups/members regarding digital media and cyberbullying. The exosystem considers factors that do not directly involve the individual, yet may influence the individual indirectly, including cyberbullying initiatives (e.g., laws, policies, and resources), digital privacy and security settings, and cyberbullying experiences of others. Within the macrosystem, factors to consider include cross-cultural views on cyberbullying, smaller-scale variations in conceptualizing cyberbullying (e.g., generational differences in understanding cyberbullying), and social norms around cyberbullying. The chronosystem takes into consideration changes in digital media and the extent of its integration into the everyday lives of individuals, life course transitions, and historical events

and crises. Finally, the digital context examines factors such as types of digital media, features, and regulations, the social and informational affordances of digital media, and digital cultures and norms. Taken together, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying helps to reveal the complex interactions among various factors and contexts that come together to contribute to cyberbullying.

The development of this new model helps to resolve a major blind spot within the cyberbullying literature, which has been that cyberbullying scholars have largely overlooked the digital context and its importance for holistically understanding the phenomenon of cyberbullying (McMahon, 2014). Arguably, this digital context has become even more important to unpack and consider given the increased interconnectedness of the socio-digital as offline and online contexts become increasing intertwined and harder to separate (Ahlborg, Ruiz-Mercado, Molander, & Masera, 2019; Oh et al., 2011). Thus, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying provides a tool for cyberbullying scholars to use going forward that can help to theoretically inform their work (see McMahon, 2014; Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Del Rey, 2015). When using the model, cyberbullying scholars are afforded great flexibility as they can adapt the model to suit the needs of their work (e.g., choosing what factors and/or ecological systems are relevant to their research questions and methodological design). Through investigations into cyberbullying informed by the social-ecological approach, and by investigating and understanding cyberbullying more holistically, there is potential for the development of better, more effective, and well-informed cyberbullying prevention and response initiatives (see Pichel et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2020). Thus, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying ought to begin to be used in investigations of cyberbullying whereby scholars can test, finetune, and expand the model.

6.2.2 Objective 2: Uncovering post-secondary students' perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying

The second objective of this work was to better understand cyberbullying from the perspectives of young adults, particularly their perceptions of cyberbullying and the criteria used to evaluate it as well as cyberbullying prevention and response initiatives at the post-secondary level. The need for a deeper understanding of cyberbullying in this age group was because there remains uncertainty within the literature regarding understandings of cyberbullying in young adulthood, mainly because cyberbullying scholars have overlooked young adults' own points of view when understanding and evaluating cyberbullying. Rather,

scholars often repurpose definitions of and criteria for cyberbullying applicable to younger age groups, assuming they too apply to young adults (Alqahtani et al., 2018). However, evidence suggests that academic-centered definitions of and criteria for cyberbullying may do not appropriately apply to adolescents (Marwick & boyd, 2014) as well as young adults (Sheanoda et al., 2021). Without research based on their own points of view (e.g., definitions; criteria used to evaluate it; how their understandings compare to academic-centred understandings of cyberbullying), we miss out on young adults' view and experiences of cyberbullying. As a result, there remains confusion, inconsistency, and uncertainty around cyberbullying occurring among young adults (Sheanoda et al., 2021).

To remedy this void, I focused on uncovering post-secondary students' perspectives and evaluations of cyberbullying to address the following research questions: What references do young adults draw upon to describe and discuss cyberbullying? According to young adults, to what extent do academic-centred criteria apply when evaluating cyberbullying? Are there alternative criteria that young adults perceive to be more important for determining and evaluating cyberbullying? Drawing from data collected in interviews with 21 undergraduate students (refer to Chapter 3), findings revealed three central references young adults draw upon to inform their understanding of cyberbullying. These included early cyberbullying education (e.g., received in elementary, middle, or high school), experiences of cyberbullying of either themselves or their friends/peers, and mediated portrayals of cyberbullying. Through these discussions, there were a few parallels seen with how young adults perceived cyberbullying and how cyberbullying has been conceptualized in the cyberbullying literature. For instance, cyberbullying occurred via digital media (e.g., on social media; through text and group messaging), and caused harm to those targeted, often deliberately (e.g., intent). Given these similarities, Sheanoda et al. (2021) suggest the necessity of further comparing young adults' perspectives and opinions regarding cyberbullying with criteria used to identify cyberbullying in the literature (e.g., repetition; intentional/willful; experienced harm; an imbalance of power) (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

Analysis of the findings revealed that since young adults perceived cyberbullying to be situation and context dependent, certain criteria they used to identify and evaluate cyberbullying differed from academic-centred criteria. One exception, however, was the criterion of experienced harm, which participants unanimously agreed helped to characterize cyberbullying. This finding demonstrates parallels with existing evidence that has drawn on

adolescent samples, suggesting that cyberbullying, like traditional bullying, is perceived to cause harm (see Marwick & boyd, 2014; Steer, Betts, Baguley, & Binder, 2020). Alternatively, young adults relied on four, not previously identified, key dimensions to evaluate and identify an instance of cyber aggression as cyberbullying, highlighting the contextualized nature of the cyberbullying experience. These dimensions included (1) who was involved, (2) the scope of harm, (3) the context in which the behaviour occurred, and (4) the platform on which the behaviour occurred. Importantly, young adults' perceptions of the severity of cyberbullying helped them to negotiate cyberbullying behaviours and feel confident in their interpretation of the behaviour.

These findings extend the work of Sheanoda et al. (2021) who suggested that academic-centred criteria of cyberbullying are not well matched to young adults' perceptions and evaluations of cyberbullying. For instance, Sheanoda et al. (2021) found young adults better describe cyberbullying as a "persistent" problem rather than as a repetitive act. As well, the findings also indicated importance regarding considering the role of anonymity in perpetrating cyberbullying, the personal and targeted nature of cyberbullying, and the experiences of cyber victims. Given these findings, several additional questions remained such as: How do young adults conceptualize and evaluate cyberbullying? What set of criteria do young adults use to classify cyberbullying behaviours and what factors matter most? Building on the work of Sheanoda et al. (2021), the present work provides an alternative set of criteria used by young adults for identifying cyberbullying and assessing its severity in different contexts. Using these dimensions and the corresponding spectrum of severity will provide cyberbullying scholars with many potential benefits such as removing persisting challenges associated providing a standard definition of cyberbullying (Alipan, Skues, Theiler, & Wise, 2019) and measuring, operationalizing, and capturing cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015; Sheanoda et al., 2021). With a richer understanding of cyberbullying in young adulthood, there is potential for expanding policy and resource development targeting young adults. In particular, there exist few cyberbullying initiatives targeted at young adults at the post-secondary level due to the uncertainty around cyberbullying occurring at this life stage (e.g., how young adults perceive cyberbullying and the types of behaviours considered to be cyberbullying) (Faucher et al., 2020). Thus, the current work sets a foundation for future studies to continue evaluations into cyberbullying occurring in young adulthood, particularly to assess the dimensions used to characterize

cyberbullying, the applicability of the dimensions to cyberbullying behaviours more broadly (e.g., larger samples of young adults; across different age groups), and the development of potential alternative or additional dimensions that may lead to more robust evaluations of cyberbullying.

6.2.3 Objective 3: Post-secondary students' perceptions of cyberbullying resources and barriers to implementation at the post-secondary level

With few, if any, cyberbullying-specific initiatives that target young adults (Faucher et al., 2020), Vaill (2021) argues that post-secondary institutions have overlooked cyberbullying as a problem. As a result, post-secondary institutions have not been upholding their duty of care to students, which requires institutions to take a firm stance against cyberbullying as well as ensure adequate and sufficient resources are in place to respond to, remedy, and support students experiencing cyberbullying (Vaill, 2021). The lack of cyberbullying resources on post-secondary campuses is problematic considering evidence that cyberbullying in young adulthood brings with it more intense, severe, and long-lasting impacts for those targeted (e.g., academic consequences; damaging their reputations; professional repercussions; long-term mental health impacts) (see Arslan & Guler, 2016; Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2019; Mishna et al., 2018). As a result, young adults may feel that not only has cyberbullying not been taken seriously (Faucher et al., 2020; Vaill, 2021), but if/when it occurs, they should deal with cyberbullying-related matters on their own (Wozencroft, Campbell, Orel, Kimpton, & Leong, 2015). To mitigate these problems, more conversations are needed centring on cyberbullying and its impacts on young adults (Cassidy et al., 2019) as well as solutions for prevention and response (Faucher et al., 2020). Therefore, the third objective of my work was to solicit post-secondary students' perspectives on how their post-secondary institution presently handles cyberbullying (e.g., what resources are available to address cyberbullying) as well as uncover potential barriers around these resources and how to overcome them. Doing so, this work helps to illuminate how and in what areas universities can make improvements (Vaill, Campbell, & Whiteford, 2021).

To address this objective, I focused on answering the following research questions: From the perspectives of post-secondary students, what resources currently exist on campus that address cyberbullying? Do students perceive there to be any barriers impeding the implementation of cyberbullying resources on post-secondary campuses? If so, how do we overcome them? Again, utilizing the data collected via interviews with 21 undergraduate

post-secondary students, findings revealed young adults perceived cyberbullying to be a prevalent and concerning problem that most post-secondary students face. Despite their concerns regarding cyberbullying as a problematic social phenomenon that brings with it potentially detrimental consequences for those targeted, students felt post-secondary institutions were neglecting and/or failing to address cyberbullying as a problem on campus. This was because there were no cyberbullying-specific resources in place to not only respond to and remedy cyberbullying that occurred, but also there was a lack of prevention initiatives to mitigate cyberbullying from occurring in the first place.

The lack of available resources was attributed to three key barriers including: (1) a lack of broader conversations about cyberbullying occurring at the post-secondary level, (2) limited knowledge around digital technologies, cyberbullying, and their impact on young adults, and (3) the stigma associated with being cyberbullied as a young adult. To better address cyberbullying and mitigate these persisting barriers, young adults identified several solutions. For instance, to address the lack of broader knowledge around cyberbullying occurring at the post-secondary level and to lessen the stigma associated with experiencing cyberbullying as a young adult, participants proposed initiatives that targeted changing the broader narrative regarding cyberbullying in young adulthood. For example, post-secondary institutions could increase education programs available to students, faculty, and staff on campus as doing so would increase awareness of and conversations around cyberbullying. As well, both within the context of institutions and society more broadly, young adults proposed increasing research investigating cyberbullying, particularly from young adults' own points of view. This was a vital solution for some participants, as understanding young adult perspectives on cyberbullying could help ignite conversations and provide deeper understanding of cyberbullying and cyberbullying outcomes, and lead to targeted and more tailored prevention and intervention programs. More broadly, young adults identified the need for a holistic approach to addressing cyberbullying – there needed to be involvement from individuals (i.e., young adults; parents; educators), post-secondary institutions, social media companies, and various societal groups and organizations (e.g., mental health services; lawmakers; police). Doing so, young adults hoped, would address all three barriers, but especially lead to a multi-level approach for providing cyberbullying-specific policies, resources, and support across a range of contexts in young adults' lives. Thus, students

believe that there is no one group that had responsibility for eliminating; rather this requires a networked response to understand, target, and prevent and respond to cyberbullying.

The current research adds to the cyberbullying literature by building on the work of Faucher et al. (2020) to investigate young adults' perceptions of cyberbullying initiatives that could be implemented by post-secondary institutions. Solutions for barriers young adults perceive as associated with cyberbullying interventions are identified, providing post-secondary institutions with a roadmap for improving anti-cyberbullying initiatives. Going forward, these findings can serve as a stepping-stone for addressing persisting barriers that are impacting the implementation of meaningful and effective resources and initiatives that address cyberbullying, which are desperately needed and wanted by young adults on post-secondary campuses. As a result, steps can be taken to remedy these barriers, demonstrating to post-secondary students that their concerns are being heard, understood, and taken seriously.

6.3 Research contributions

Based on the findings, four significant contributions come from this dissertation. First, theoretically, chapter two proposes the social-ecological model of cyberbullying. Through this new model, cyberbullying scholars are presented with a tool to help them theoretically ground and inform their work. What is unique about the social-ecological model of cyberbullying, in comparison to other theoretical frameworks or approaches used by cyberbullying scholars (e.g., Routine Activities Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory), is that the model examines cyberbullying holistically. This means that not only are digital-specific factors and the digital context fully recognized in the model, which has been a common pitfall when attempting to theoretically inform cyberbullying research (McMahon, 2014), but the social-ecological model of cyberbullying also considers the interconnectedness of the digital context with other contexts (e.g., individual, communal, and societal contexts). Thus, the social-ecological model of cyberbullying is a holistic analysis of cyberbullying, which critically evaluates the various and continually changing factors that need to be considered for academics to obtain a broader and deeper understanding of the causes, harms, and potential strategies to deal with cyberbullying. The model fills a gap in the existing research that relied on theoretical models that were not able to provide for the level of analysis needed in a modern digital world due to young peoples' greater reliance on digital media, which has subsequently resulted in bullying behaviours to evolve and become more

complex. Through a more holistic understanding, there is the potential for better, more informed cyberbullying interventions.

Second, centring the research methodology around conducting interviews, as detailed in chapter three, allowed the study participants the opportunity to describe cyberbullying in their own words, which reinforced the importance of allowing young adults to speak openly and freely about cyberbullying. Interviews allowed participants to define cyberbullying behaviours on their own terms, rather than utilizing the narrow definitions and/or criteria of cyberbullying previous studies provided to their participants; most of which were initially derived to capture cyberbullying among children, assuming the same definitions and criteria would apply to young adults (Alqahtani et al., 2018). These academic-centered understandings of cyberbullying are not necessarily applicable across age groups as my findings have shown, consistent with emerging literature elsewhere (see Marwick & boyd, 2014; Sheanoda et al., 2021). Thus, by consciously organizing the research methodology around conducting interviews, I was able to delve deeper into young adults' understanding of cyberbullying, specifically how they describe cyberbullying, the types of factors that they draw upon to label cyberbullying behaviours, and in what ways they make decisions regarding cyberbullying.

Third, the interview approach revealed four key dimensions that young adults draw upon to classify and label cyberbullying behaviours including who was involved, the scope of harm, the context in which the behaviour occurred, and the platform on which the behaviour occurred (see chapter four). These dimensions provide a solid foundation for future work exploring cyberbullying by pointing to the key considerations young adults make when identifying, engaging in, or even reporting cyberbullying behaviours. Identifying these key dimensions points to the necessity of a holistic approach to researching cyberbullying because of the interconnected nature and reliance that each dimension has on the others. Understanding these dimensions and how different groups understand cyberbullying provides important context to shape future research questions within the cyberbullying literature, but this understanding also more broadly allows individuals to understand the nuance of cyberbullying and incorporate more effective strategies into their education programs, intervention strategies, user agreements, and other items that often interact with cyberbullying. Essentially, this deeper understanding can provide more appropriate context

for how people, whether individually or collectively, handle and interact with cyberbullying in the future.

These dimensions of cyberbullying also provide key indicators for identifying and evaluating cyberbullying among young adults, which aids in distinguishing cyberbullying from other forms of interpersonal harm (e.g., drama; gossip; interpersonal conflict). While this work focused on young adults, these dimensions may also apply to teenagers who differ from young adults in some ways; but literature suggests these variations are less pronounced than the difference between young children and teenagers (e.g., see the work of Marwick & boyd, 2014). Again, in an increasingly digital world, having various frameworks for different cohorts and age groups is essential, as this is part of the context in which cyberbullying happens, and would impact each dimension I uncovered. Having age specific frameworks may allow for an understanding of how cyberbullying transforms in its goals and impacts on individuals as well as inform the type of intervention used in various contexts (i.e., school; homes; social media platforms). With age-specific and holistic models, uncovering the barriers to implementing effective change may also be possible, providing the framework for examining real-life developments that benefit online safety as a whole.

Fourth, knowing that cyberbullying is a complex issue that needs to be addressed at each level of analysis (e.g., within the family, school, social groups, and the broader society), it is important to holistically address the beliefs, structures, and norms that allow cyberbullying to be perpetuated. Uncovering barriers to prevention and response at each of these levels will indicate ways narratives need to shift regarding cyberbullying, which can help lead to better informed interventions that more appropriately apply to young adults, and beyond. This work is a gateway to opening the narrative toward revealing the ways young adults understand cyberbullying and its treatment. Subsequently, a roadmap is provided to address institutional responses and practices (e.g., where it happens); societal norms and beliefs (e.g., where it happens); experiences of cyber victims (e.g., scope of harm); and the roles of cyberbullies who perpetuate cyberbullying and/or those who witness it as a bystander (e.g., who is involved; context the behaviour occurs).

The impacts of cyberbullying can be dire, and mental health is often an impacted area of a cyber victim's life, so using this information to bring in more holistic treatment that not only educates to prevent cyberbullying, but also provides holistic and person-centered treatment to cyber victims afterwards, would inform mental health practices, supports, and

availability. Education that is relevant to the audience will better engage young adults in challenging their beliefs and behaviours, and may encourage more early intervention, self-monitoring, and collaboration among social groups to create safer online spaces free from this type of invasive harassment. However, this education needs to happen at each level in which digital media is introduced to young people's lives; meaning the platforms themselves need to adopt these frameworks and knowledges into their community standards and safety practices, so that they are preventing the behaviors that are currently happening, as these behaviors may change over time, or the severity may change based on the context. Without this information, these guidelines would be redundant and irrelevant to the actual users of the platforms. For instance, educators may adopt this into their training or classroom rules, families may shape their household rules and discourse around online spaces differently, social media platforms may enhance their regulations or adapt the reporting mechanisms in place, and even young adults might be empowered to challenge these behaviors and seek appropriate resources as needed with this deeper and more nuanced understanding of cyberbullying.

6.4 Limitations and future research

Despite the benefits of this work, there are limitations that must be recognized. The central limitation is that the sample from which this study draws was limited in scope and diversity. The challenges brought about during the COVID-19 pandemic changed the first-year student experience (e.g., virtual learning; remote from campus). As a result, first-year students were omitted from the sample. Future research should consider investigating post-secondary students' perspectives of cyberbullying more broadly, such as including students across all years of study (e.g., first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year students) as well as post-graduate students. Such investigations could lead to more fruitful discoveries of cyberbullying across the life course as well as potentially revealing variations in cyberbullying within young adulthood as well. For example, the hierarchical nature of post-secondary institutions (e.g., between programs/departments; undergraduate and graduate students; students and faculty) may cause new power imbalances to exist (see Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2017), which could result in heighted competition and relational conflicts that motivate cyberbullying (Cunningham et al., 2015; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). By expanding the scope of the sample, scholars can simultaneously expand our knowledge of cyberbullying relative to post-secondary populations and, more broadly, young adulthood. This could subsequently have

implications for understanding the prevalence and treatment of cyberbullying at the post-secondary level (e.g., different initiatives in place to target different age-groups of students).

Next, while efforts were made to recruit a diverse range of undergraduate students, it was largely unsuccessful as the sample for this work fell into a common pitfall scholars face when working with post-secondary populations: it was dominated by the perspectives of women (see Barlow & Cromer, 2006; McCray, King, & Bailly, 2005). To obtain a diverse sample, recruitment was done through reaching out across all undergraduate programs across campus, an array of student groups, and an open call for participants on university affiliated social media pages. However, I speculate that these efforts failed given that the call for participants was a general call and not targeted to specific student groups. Nonetheless, despite evidence that cyberbullying disproportionately impacts women (see Choi & Lee, 2017; Sobba, Paez, & ten Bensel, 2017), future research ought to garner more diverse samples. These investigations should include, but not be limited to, BIPOC individuals and members of the LGBTQ+ community. These are important lines of inquiry given investigations of cyberbullying reveal that BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students are at heightened risk of experiencing cyberbullying (Abreu & Kenny, 2018; Hinduja & Patchin, 2020; Mishna et al., 2018). Therefore, future inquiries investigating these populations could offer meaningful insights not yet fully acknowledged within the literature (e.g., offer alternative perspectives and/or counternarratives overlooked within the literature; develop of tailored support services and resources for minority individuals; enhance education about the impacts of cyberbullying on individuals from marginalized populations), as well as diversify our understanding and evaluation of cyberbullying. To do so, scholars need to focus on utilizing more diverse qualitative approaches, such as case studies and narrative inquiries, as these methods could facilitate the voices of marginalized groups (Cassidy et al., 2019). By uncovering the perspectives of individuals from a more diverse sample, we can better obtain a wider knowledge base of how individuals from these respective groups are impacted by cyberbullying as well as what sorts of strategies they feel could be implemented to target cyberbullying that more appropriately apply to them and their experiences.

Finally, while this study contributes to the larger body of literature calling for the need for post-secondary institutions to implement cyberbullying-specific initiatives on campus (Vaill, 2021), and the necessity for these initiatives to be rooted in the perspectives of post-secondary students (Faucher et al., 2020), the findings are limited in that they only

represent the voices and opinions of one group of students from one institution. Future research ought to extend investigations of cyberbullying by garnering more students' voices across campuses and cultures. Once a sufficient body of evidence is established, scholars ought to focus on obtaining large-scale data (e.g., via surveys) that corroborate suggestions and solutions perceived to be most effective to preventing and responding to cyberbullying for affective groups. Using larger-scale approaches, scholars can evaluate the types of initiatives proposed, which could lead to indications of potential effectiveness prior to the initiative being implemented. Such work is necessary because, as evidenced through the perspectives of those in study as well as within the cyberbullying literature (see Faucher et al., 2020; Vaill, 2021), *"we just got to do it better somehow"* (Eloise Abbey, W, 21).

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Appendices

Appendix A. Pre-interview questionnaire

1. How old are you? [____]
2. What year were you born? [____]
3. How would you describe your gender?
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Transgender
    d. Other, please specify [____]
4. Where is your hometown? [____]
5. Were you born in Canada?
    a. Yes
    b. No
        i. *If no:* What country were you born? [____]
6. What were you doing prior to attending post-secondary?
    a. High school
    b. Gap year
    c. Working
    d. Other, please specify [____]
7. Which year of university are you currently enrolled in?
    a. Second year
    b. Third year
    c. Fourth year
8. What campus are you currently enrolled at?
    a. Western main campus
    b. Kings
    c. Brescia
    d. Huron
9. Are you in part-time (enrolled in 3.0 or fewer courses) or full-time studies (enrolled in more than 3.0 courses)?
    a. Part-time
    b. Full-time
10. Do you live on or off campus and who do you live with?
    a. In residence – alone
    b. In residence – with roommates
    c. Off-campus – alone
    d. Off-campus – with my partner/spouse
    e. Off-campus – with roommates
    f. Off-campus – with family
11. Do you do any paid work in addition to attending classes?
    a. Yes – full-time
    b. Yes – part-time
    c. No, I am not currently employed
12. Do you do any unpaid work in addition to attending classes (e.g. volunteering, placement)?
    a. Yes
    b. No
13. Where do you most frequently access the Internet?
    a. At home
    b. At school
    c. Public place (e.g. library, café)

d. Other, please specify [_____]

14. Which of the following devices do you own? Select all that apply.
    a. Computer or laptop
    b. Tablet or iPad
    c. Mobile phone or smartphone
15. Approximately how many hours per day do you spend on each of the following devices (Note: If you do not own the device listed, please enter "0"):
    a. Computer or laptop [_____]
    b. Tablet or iPad [_____]
    c. Mobile phone or smartphone [_____]
16. How would you rate your digital skill level?
    a. Not skilled at all
    b. Not very skilled
    c. Fairly skilled
    d. Very skilled
    e. Expert
17. Do you use any of the following social media platforms? Select all that apply.
    a. Facebook
    b. Instagram
    c. Twitter
    d. Snapchat
    e. TikTok
18. Approximately how many hours per day do you spend on each of the following social media platforms (Note: If you do not use the platform listed, please enter "0"):
    a. Facebook [_____]
    b. Instagram [_____]
    c. Twitter [_____]
    d. Snapchat [_____]
    e. TikTok [_____]
19. On any of these social media accounts, do you:

	Facebook	**Instagram**	**Twitter**	**Snapchat**	**TikTok**
Use a name other than your real name					
Have more than one/multiple accounts					
Are friends with or follow someone you do not know in real life					

20. How often do you post on each of the following social media platforms? Please select N/A if you do not use the social media platform listed.

	Multiple times per day	**Daily**	**Weekly**	**Every few weeks**	**Every few months**	**Rarely/ Never**	**N/A**
Facebook							
Instagram							
Twitter							
Snapchat							
TikTok							

21. When do you most often access social media? Please select N/A if you do not use social media.
    a. During free time
    b. While at school and/or work
    c. During social occasion
    d. Any spare moment
    e. N/A
22. What is your go-to device to access social media? Please select N/A if you do not use social media.
    a. Computer or laptop
    b. Tablet or iPad
    c. Mobile phone or smartphone
    d. Other, please specify [____]
    e. N/A
23. What do you use social media for? Select all that apply. Please select N/A if you do not use social media.
    a. Keeping in touch with family and/or friends
    b. Meeting new people
    c. Dating
    d. Hanging out/socializing online
    e. Planning events/arranging get-togethers
    f. News
    g. Entertainment
    h. Research
    i. To browse/waste time
    j. To share your photos and/or videos
    k. Learn new skills
    l. Maintain your digital reputation
24. How important are social media platforms to you for socializing, hanging out, and/or communicating with others? Please select N/A if you do not use social media.
    a. N/A
    b. Not at all important
    c. Slightly important
    d. Important
    e. Fairly important
    f. Very important
25. Which of the following security/privacy precautions do you take on your social media accounts? Select all that apply. Please select N/A if you do not use social media.
    a. I do not use any security/privacy precautions.
    b. Use a strong password
    c. Have a different password for each social media account
    d. Enabled two-factor authentication
    e. Set up security questions
    f. Selective with friend requests
    g. Have a private account (not public)
    h. Limit what you post
    i. Limit who can see your posts
    j. Review content you have been tagged in
    k. Other, please specify [____]
    l. N/A

Appendix B. Interview guide

Participant Alias:
Participant ID#:
Participant DOB:
Date of Interview:
Location of Interview: Zoom
Interview Start Time:
Interview End Time:
Consent form signed: [___] YES / [___] NO
Questionnaire complete: [___] YES / [___] NO

Hello. My name is Molly-Gloria Harper. I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview today. We will be together for about 90 to 120 minutes. If you need a break, please let me know. The aim of this study is to examine post-secondary students' perspectives on cyberbullying, specifically how second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduate students perceive and evaluate cyberbullying. We are also interested in what factors young adults consider when defining, discussing, and navigating cyberbullying within online environments and among their social networks.

I will be asking you a series of questions but want to let you know that I am not here to convince you of anything or try to sway your opinion. As a reminder, your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time. You or the research team can stop the session at any time, including if there are any technical difficulties. You do not waive any legal rights by participating in this research study. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. If you do withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you and, should this be the case, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database. Once the results of the study have been published, you will not be able to withdraw your information. All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results are published, your name or any other identifying information will not be used. Rather, any information used in the write-up of this study will refer to you and each participant using a participant ID number and pseudonym. As a reminder, as a researcher I have a duty to report in the case of disclosure of any information suggesting you or others are in immediate danger. If this occurs, it will break confidentiality.

This session is being audio and video recorded; however, only the audio file will be saved upon the completion of today's interview. If you have any technical difficulties at any time during this study, please use the chat function, raise your hand function, or email me and I will assist in any way I can. Did you have any questions for me before we get started? *If so, address.*

A. Transition to Post-Secondary

Let's begin by talking a little bit about how you have navigated and adjusted to post-secondary.

1. What program are you currently enrolled in?

2. Thinking back to when you were in first year, how did you find the transition to post-secondary?
    - Have you faced any challenges since? *Prompt for COVID-19 changes.*
        - *If yes:* Can you tell me about them? How are you managing/have managed them?

3. Since starting post-secondary, have your social relationships/friendships changed at all?
    - *If yes:* With who? In what ways?
    - *If yes:* How have you dealt with these changes?
    - *If no:* How have they stayed the same?

B. Cyberbullying

Now let's talk about cyberbullying.

4. What does the word cyberbullying mean to you?
    - Do you think the term cyberbullying useful? Why or why not?
    - Do you see any problems with the term cyberbullying?
      Prompt for being applied to broadly, applied to behaviours that are not necessary cyberbullying.

5. How would you recognize cyberbullying? What criteria must be met?
    - Can you give me an example of a cyberbullying instance? This can be something you have experienced or someone else like a friend has experienced.
    - I am now going to say a series of words or phrases. I want to know your opinion on them and if you think they help to describe cyberbullying.
      Probe for why or why not.
        - Repetitive
        - Intentional
        - Imbalance of power
        - Revenge-seeking
        - Just a joke
        - Harmful/Dangerous

6. In what ways does cyberbullying differ from offline forms of bullying?
    - How does cyberbullying compare to other forms of conflict?
      Prompt for digital drama and how to distinguish between types of conflict and cyberbullying.

7. What usually is the relation between those involved in cyberbullying (e.g. the bully and the victim)?
   Prompt for if they are strangers/unknown to one another, friends, peers more generally
    - Are there certain types of behaviours between friends that are acceptable that wouldn't otherwise be acceptable between individuals not known to one another or who are not friends?
      Prompt for what types of behaviours and why.

8. What do you think are the motivations for engaging in cyberbullying?

Participant check-in: At this point in the conversation, I wanted to take a moment and make sure you are still comfortable moving forward.

9. What types of online environments do you think cyberbullying most commonly takes place?
    - What features of online environments do you think influences the occurrence of cyberbullying? Examples.
      Probe for anonymity, fake accounts/alias use, online disinhibition, 24/7 nature online.

Last, let's talk a little bit about cyberbullying, specifically at the post-secondary level and what you think can be done regarding cyberbullying prevention, policies, and education moving forward.

10. Do you think cyberbullying is an issue at the post-secondary level?
Prompt for why or why not and level of seriousness.
    - Should more attention be paid to cyberbullying among post-secondary students? Why or why not?

11. Do you think the university has provided sufficient support to students to address cyberbullying and/or support victims of cyberbullying?
    - Are you aware of any on campus policies or recourses related to cyberbullying? *Prompt for what types of policies or resources and where they heard about them.*

12. Do you think adults like parents and teachers/professors properly understand cyberbullying among young adults? What about adults in society more generally?
Prompt for why or why not.
    - What role should they play or to what extent should they be involved?
    - Do you think some adults provide more understanding than others? *Prompt for who and in what ways.*

13. In your opinion, what are effective responses to cyberbullying?
    - What strategies can be used to prevent, educate, and/or help reduce cyberbullying?
    - What can post-secondary institutions do?
    - Whose responsibility is it to deal with cyberbullying?
    - Are there barriers to supporting those who have been involved in cyberbullying? *Prompt for what these barriers are and how they can be addressed.*

That concludes the end of our discussion. We have had a very stimulating conversation today and it was enjoyable to hear your thoughts and opinions. Before we wrap up, does you have any comments that you would like to add or are there any questions you have about anything that was discussed? *If so, address.*

I want to thank you for your time today, it has been very much appreciated. Before I end the call, I want to remind you that you will be receiving a follow-up email with various resources should you want/need them, or even if you just want more information. As well, following this email you will be receiving a CDN$5.00 Starbucks e-gift card as a token of our appreciation for your participation today. Once again, thank you and have a great day. Best of luck with your studies.

Appendix C. Recruitment email script

Email 1: Initial Invitation to Participate

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research
** Attach letter of information and digital recruitment poster)*

Dear Professor NAME/Undergraduate Department Chair NAME/Program Coordinator NAME,

My name is Molly-Gloria Harper, a fourth year Ph.D. Candidate in the department of sociology here at Western University. Presently, I am working to complete my dissertation, which focuses on building a theoretical framework to investigate cyberbullying through a perspective-taking approach. Specifically, I am investigating how young adults who are second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduate students define and perceive cyberbullying occurring within online environments and among their social networks. I am emailing you today asking if you would please consider forwarding my call for research participants to undergraduate students in your course/department and/or sharing this information on your course OWL page. In this email I have attached the letter of information as well as a digital recruitment poster. Should you have any questions, please contact either myself or the principal investigator, Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase, via email at cbstudy@uwo.ca.

Many thanks for your time and consideration,
Molly

MESSAGE TO FORWARD:

Hello,

You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase (principal investigator) and Molly-Gloria Harper, Ph.D. Candidate (co-investigator) are conducting entitled **Perspective-taking in cyberbullying**. Briefly, the study involves investigation into cyberbullying at the post-secondary level, specifically how young adults perceive and understand cyberbullying occurring within online environments and among their social networks. Participation in this study will involve a virtual interview lasting between 90 to 120 minutes. You do not need to be an active social media user nor have had involvement in cyberbullying to participate in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You will be financially compensated for your participation with a CDN$5.00 e-gift card to Starbucks. If you would like more information on this study, please read the attached letter of information and please contact either member of the research team via email at cbstudy@uwo.ca

Thank you,
Molly

Principal Investigator
Anabel Quan-Haase
Department of Sociology
University of Western Ontario
London, ON
N6G 2V4

Co-Investigator
Molly-Gloria Harper
Department of Sociology
University of Western Ontario
London, ON
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Email 2: Reminder to Reshare Study Recruitment

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research
** Attach letter of information and digital recruitment poster*

Dear Professor NAME/Undergraduate Department Chair NAME/Program Coordinator NAME,

An email was sent to you approximately one month ago asking if you would consider sharing our study with undergraduate students in your course/department. We wanted to send a quick reminder about our study and ask if you would be willing to once again share via email and/or your course OWL page our call for research participants. In this email I have attached the letter of information as well as a digital recruitment poster. Should you have any questions, please contact either myself or the principal investigator, Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase, via email at cbstudy@uwo.ca.

Many thanks for your time and consideration,
Molly-Gloria Harper

MESSAGE TO FORWARD:

Hello,

You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase (principal investigator) and Molly-Gloria Harper, Ph.D. Candidate (co-investigator) are conducting entitled **Perspective-taking in cyberbullying**. Briefly, the study involves investigation into cyberbullying at the post-secondary level, specifically how young adults perceive and understand cyberbullying occurring within online environments and among their social networks. Participation in this study will involve a virtual interview lasting between 90 to 120 minutes. You do not need to be an active social media user nor have had involvement in cyberbullying to participate in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You will be financially compensated for your participation with a CDN$5.00 e-gift card to Starbucks. If you would like more information on this study, please read the attached letter of information and please contact either member of the research team via email at cbstudy@uwo.ca

Thank you,
Molly

Principal Investigator
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Department of Sociology
University of Western Ontario
London, ON
N6G 2V4

Co-Investigator
Molly-Gloria Harper
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University of Western Ontario
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Appendix D. Recruitment poster

Appendix E. Participant email script

Email 1: Initial Invitation to Participate

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research (Cyberbullying study)
**Attach LOI and written consent*

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in participating in the research study that we, Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase (principal investigator) and Molly-Gloria Harper, Ph.D. Candidate (co-investigator) are conducting entitled **Perspective-taking in cyberbullying**.

In this email you will find attached the letter of information along with a written consent form. We ask that you carefully read the letter of information and ask us any questions should they arise. Once you feel comfortable doing so, we ask you to complete and sign the written consent form either electronically or you can print and scan the form and return it to us via email. The written consent form must be returned to us prior to your participation. Instructions for how to electronically sign a PDF document can be found here: https://helpx.adobe.com/ca/reader/using/sign-pdfs.html.

Last, we ask that you please provide a few (approximately four to five) possible dates and a various selection of times that would work best for you so we can schedule the interview at your convenience. These would be dates and times when you have approximately 90 to 120 minutes uninterrupted. Once we have the interview/ scheduled, you will receive a second email that gives you the date and time of the session and invites you to complete the pre-interview questionnaire.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or should anything arise, do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you,
Molly

Co-Investigator:
Molly-Gloria Harper, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Sociology
University of Western Ontario
London, ON
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REMINDER: Please not communicate personal sensitive information by e-mail. Email is not routinely monitored outside of work hours (Monday to Friday between the hours of 8am and 6pm). Please do not use e-mail to communicate emergency or urgent matters – please contact your trusted health care professional(s). If it is an emergency, call 911.

Email 2: Scheduling the Interview

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research (Cyberbullying study)

Hello,

Thank you for providing us your availability to participate in an interview/focus group.

Based on your availability, the interview is scheduled to be conducted on [**INSERT DATE & TIME**]. Should any conflicts arise prior to this, please email me as soon as possible.

If not done so already: Please do not forget to complete and sign the written consent form either electronically or you can print and scan the form and return it to us via email. The written consent form must be returned to us prior to your participation. Instructions for how to electronically sign a PDF document can be found here: https://helpx.adobe.com/ca/reader/using/sign-pdfs.html.

If consent has been obtained: Here, you will find the link to the pre-interview/focus group questionnaire. We ask that you complete this questionnaire at your leisure, but *before* the interview/focus group.

Link: https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8eIZFMMLPa7FF8V

You will receive an email 24 hours prior to the interview with the Zoom ID and meeting details. In the meantime, if you have any questions or should anything arise, do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you,
Molly

Co-Investigator:
Molly-Gloria Harper, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Sociology
University of Western Ontario
London, ON
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cbstudy@uwo.ca

REMINDER: Please not communicate personal sensitive information by e-mail. Email is not routinely monitored outside of work hours (Monday to Friday between the hours of 8am and 6pm). Please do not use e-mail to communicate emergency or urgent matters – please contact your trusted health care professional(s). If it is an emergency, call 911.

Appendix F. Letter of information & written consent

Title of Study: Perspective-taking in cyberbullying

Principal Investigator
Anabel Quan-Haase
Department of Sociology
University of Western Ontario
London, ON
N6G 2V4

Co-Investigator
Molly-Gloria Harper
Department of Sociology
University of Western Ontario
London, ON
N6G 2V4

1. **Invitation to Participate:**

You are being invited to participate in this research study entitled Perspective-taking in cyberbullying, which is being conducted at Western University. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

2. **Purpose of this Study:**

The aim of this study is to examine post-secondary students' perspectives on cyberbullying, specifically how undergraduate students perceive and evaluate cyberbullying. We are also interested in what factors young adults consider when defining, discussing, and navigating cyberbullying within online environments and among their social networks.

3. **Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria:**

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are: 1) A second-, third-, or fourth-year undergraduate student attending Western University or an affiliate college (Kings, Brescia, Huron); 2) English-Speaking; 3) Between 18 and 25 years of age.

Individuals not attending Western University or an affiliate college (Kings, Brescia, Huron), and/or first-year or upper students (fourth year and beyond), and/or are younger than 18 years of age or are older than age 25 are not eligible to participate in this study.

4. **Study Procedures:**

If you agree to participate, you will either participate in a virtual interview. Prior to your participation, we will ask you to complete a pre-interview questionnaire, which asks a little bit about who you are and your technology and social media use. This questionnaire will be conducted via Qualtrics, a Western University approved survey program. The link to the questionnaire will be sent via email at the time the interview has been scheduled. This questionnaire will take you about fifteen minutes or less to complete and can be done at your leisure.

Your participation in the interview will begin with a discussion about the transition to post-secondary and then focus on a series of questions centered on your perspectives around cyberbullying.

(A) ***Interview:*** Prior to the interview, a member of the research team will contact you via email to ask your availability to schedule the interview at a time that works best for you. You will then receive a second email with the confirmed date and time of the interview along with a reminder to complete and return the written consent form. In this email you will receive the link to complete the pre-interview questionnaire. Twenty-four hours before the interview, you will receive a third email confirming the date and time of the interview along with the Zoom log in details (meeting ID and password), including instructions for how to change your username should you choose to do so. The interview will last approximately 90 to 120

minutes and take place via Zoom, a Western University approved recording method (e.g. encrypted, password protected, and meets all Western related requirements). You can use your discretion to either turn on your video or keep the video turned off for the duration of the interview. With your consent, the interview will be audio and video recorded. Consent for the video recording is needed as Zoom records both audio and video simultaneously. However, upon completion of the interview, only the audio file will be saved, meaning no video footage will be retained. The audio recording is for research purposes only. The recording will be transcribed by NVivo, a transcription and data analysis company. This means the words on the recording will be written out. When the recording is transcribed, any information that could identify you will be removed and/or changed. Once transcribed, the recording will be used to check for accuracy of the transcript then will be destroyed. Transcriptions will be stored separate from any identifying information. ID numbers and pseudonyms will be used in the transcripts of the interview, as well as in the research papers that will be generated from the data. Upon completion of your participation, a follow-up email with resources, should you need them or want to know more, will be sent to you via email. You will also receive a following email from Starbucks Canada with your CDN$5.00 e-gift card, which will also contain instructions for how to redeem and use your e-gift card.

5. Possible Risks and Harms:

The possible risks and harms to you include resurfacing of potentially painful memories or experiences of and/or related to cyberbullying.

6. Possible Benefits:

The possible benefits of your participation in this study is the recognition that your voice and perspective regarding cyberbullying has been heard and will help to inform conversations around cyberbullying. The possible benefits to society will be a better understanding of cyberbullying among post-secondary students, pinpointing criteria on how cyberbullying is perceived and evaluated, and the factors to consider when situating cyberbullying, all of which can lead to improved education, prevention tools, and/or policies targeting cyberbullying.

9. Compensation:

You will be financially compensated for your participation with a CDN$5.00 e-gift card to Starbucks.

10. Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time. You or the research team can stop the session at any time, including if there are any technical difficulties. You do not waive any legal rights by participating in this research study. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. If you do withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you and, should this be the case, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database. Once the results of the study have been published, we will not be able to withdraw your information.

11. Confidentiality:

In order to communicate with you, obtain your consent, and schedule participation in this research, we ask that you provide your name, age, and email address. These pieces of information are for these purposes only and will not disclosed to anyone outside the research team (composed of the principal and co-investigator). All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. Data and transcripts will be saved on a personal computer and backed up on a hard drive. Both the computer and hard drive are password protected with the laptop also being fingerprint protected, and the files will be encrypted. All data will be stored in accordance with Western's University policy (for a minimum of 7 years). Electronic files will be deleted after this

time. If the results are published, your name or any other identifying information will not be used. Rather, any information used in the write-up of this study will refer to you and each participant using a participant ID number and pseudonym. The consent forms with emails and signatures will be kept separate from your responses, which will not include sensitive information. It is important for you to know that representatives of Western University's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

While we will do our very best and make every effort to protect your confidentiality, there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. Like with online shopping for example, teleconferencing/videoconferencing technology has some privacy and security risks. It is possible that information could be intercepted by unauthorized people (hacked) or otherwise shared by accident. This risk cannot be completely eliminated. We want to make you aware of this.

Your de-identified data may be retained indefinitely and could be used for future research purposes (e.g. answering new research questions). By consenting to participate in this study, you are agreeing your de-identified data can be used beyond the purpose of the present study by either the current or other researchers. If used for the purpose of future research, your identifiable information will not be shared.

While the likelihood of information surfacing that requires the duty to report (e.g. abuse, reports to self-harm, harm to others), there is a possibility that this could occur. If this is the case, we want to make you aware that the researchers are legally obligated to report these self-disclosures or any information suggesting there is immediate danger. As a result, this would break confidentiality.

12. Contacts for Further Information:
Before you decide to accept this invitation to partake in this study, you may ask any and all questions you might have. If you have any questions at this time before, during, or after your participation and require further information about this research you may contact the co-investigator, Molly-Gloria Harper or the principal investigator in the Department of Sociology, Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase via email at cbstudy@uwo.ca. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics at (519) 661-3036 or via email at ethics@uwo.ca. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. We would like to remind you that everything you discuss will be kept confidential.

13. Publication:
If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please contact Molly-Gloria Harper (co-investigator) or Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase (principal investigator) via email at cbstudy@uwo.ca.

14. Consent:
If you agree to participate in this research project and accept the conditions outlined above, please sign the attached consent form (enabled to be signed electronically or you can print and scan the form) and return it via email before the interview begins. Instructions for how to electronically sign a PDF document can be found here: https://helpx.adobe.com/ca/reader/using/sign-pdfs.html.

Thank you for your time and participation.

*This letter is yours to keep for future reference***.**

Written Consent Form:

Title: Perspective-taking in cyberbullying

Principal Investigator: Anabel Quan-Haase, Department of Sociology, Western University

Co-Investigator: Molly-Gloria Harper, Department of Sociology, Western University

You are making the decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your responses and signature indicate you are 18 years of age or older, you have read the Letter of Information, you have had all your questions answered, and you have decided to take part in this research.

Please place an "X" checking yes or no to the following statements:

I confirm I have read the Letter of Information [or the letter of information has been read to me] and have had all questions answered to my satisfaction.	Yes □	No □
I agree to be recorded in this research (only audio file will be saved).	Yes □	No □
I agree to participate in the study:	Yes □	No □
I understand the researchers' duty to report.	Yes □	No □
I give permission for my email to be used to send me a CDN$5.00 Starbucks e-gift card as compensation for participation in this study.	Yes □	No □

I consent to participants in (pick one): Interview □

Participant's Name (please print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

[For Researcher Only]

I, the undersigned, believe that the participant has understood the relevant details of this research and has knowingly given their consent. I verify I have answered any and all of their questions to their satisfaction.

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print): _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G. Debriefing email

Subject Line: Thank you & Follow-up

Thank you for your participation in this study. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perspective of second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduate students regarding how they perceive and evaluate cyberbullying. We were also interested in what factors young adults consider when defining, discussing, and navigating cyberbullying within online environments and among their social networks.

Following the conversation and discussion, here are some resources and references if you would like to read more and/or wish to seek follow-up. As a reminder, all results are confidential and anonymous. If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact any member of the research team (via contact information below).

You will be receiving an additional email with your CDN$5.00 Starbucks e-gift card, which will also contain instructions for how to redeem and use your e-gift card as a token of our appreciation for your time. If any problems arise, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the research team via email at cbstudy@uwo.ca.

Thank you again for your time and participation in this study. We wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

Principal Investigator
Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase
Department of Sociology
University of Western Ontario
London, ON
N6G 2V4

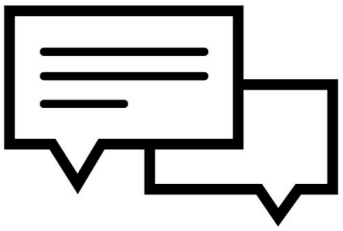
Co-Investigator:
Molly-Gloria Harper, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Sociology
University of Western Ontario
London, ON
N6G 2V4

REMINDER: Please not communicate personal sensitive information by e-mail. Email is not routinely monitored outside of work hours (Monday to Friday between the hours of 8am and 6pm). Please do not use e-mail to communicate emergency or urgent matters – please contact your trusted health care professional(s). If it is an emergency, call 911. **This email account will be terminated on August 30th, 2021. After this time, we will no longer be able to check and/or access this account.**

Appendix H. Resource flyer

CYBERBULLYING RESOURCES

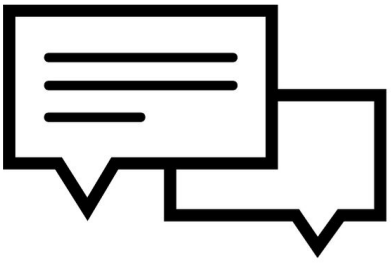
LOCAL RESOURCES



- **UWO Cyber Smart:**
  https://cybersmart.uwo.ca/help/safety_over_the_internet.html
- **UWO Wellness Education Centre:**
  519-661-2111 (ext. 87127) | https://www.uwo.ca/health/wec/index.html
- **UWO Student Health Centre**:
  https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/
- **London Police Service:**
  519-661-5670 (non-emergency) | https://www.londonpolice.ca/en/index.aspx
- **Middlesex Health Unit:**
  519-663-5317 | https://www.healthunit.com/contact-mlhu
- **CAMH Middlesex:**
  519-434-9191 | https://cmhamiddlesex.ca
- **WAYS Mental Health Support:**
  519-433-0334 | https://ways.on.ca

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL RESOURCES

- **Bullying Canada:**
  https://www.bullyingcanada.ca
- **PREVNet Canada:**
  https://www.prevnet.ca
- **CyberTip.ca:**
  https://www.cybertip.ca/app/en/report
- **Need Help Now:**
  https://needhelpnow.ca/app/en/
- **Media Smarts:**
  https://mediasmarts.ca
- **Kids Help Phone:**
  1-800-668-6868 | https://kidshelpphone.ca
- **REACH OUT:**
  1-866-933-2023 | https://reachout247.ca (online chat option available)
- **PACER National Bullying Prevention Center:**
  https://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/cyberbullying/
- **Cyberbullying Research Center:**
  https://cyberbullying.org/resources
- **Eluna Network:**
  https://elunanetwork.org/resources/cyber-bullying-awareness/



Appendix I. Research ethics approval letter

Western Research

Date: 26 August 2020

To: Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase

Project ID: 116238

Study Title: Perspective-taking in cyberbullying: Building a social-ecological model of cyberbullying to investigate, evaluate, and better understand young adults' perceptions of cyberbullying

Short Title: Perspective-taking in cyberbullying

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: September 4 2020

Date Approval Issued: 26/Aug/2020

REB Approval Expiry Date: 26/Aug/2021

Dear Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
V2_Pre-studyQuestionnaire	Online Survey	13/Aug/2020	2
V2_Interview Guide	Interview Guide	13/Aug/2020	2
V2_Focus Group Discussion Guide	Focus Group(s) Guide	13/Aug/2020	2
V2_DebriefingFollowUp_Resource Flyer	Debriefing document	13/Aug/2020	2
V2_DigitalRecruitmentPoster	Recruitment Materials	13/Aug/2020	2
V2_Recruitment Email Script_Participant Email Script	Recruitment Materials	13/Aug/2020	2
V2_Recruitment Social Media Script	Recruitment Materials	13/Aug/2020	2
V2_LetterofInformation_Written Consent	Written Consent/Assent	13/Aug/2020	2

Documents Acknowledged:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Patterson, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Appendix J. Research ethics amendment approval letter

Western Research

Date: 24 March 2021

To: Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase

Project ID: 116238

Study Title: Perspective-taking in cyberbullying: Building a social-ecological model of cyberbullying to investigate, evaluate, and better understand young adults' perceptions of cyberbullying

Application Type: NMREB Amendment Form

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: April 9 2021

Date Approval Issued: 24/Mar/2021 17:21

REB Approval Expiry Date: 26/Aug/2021

Dear Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the amendment, as of the date noted above.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
V3_Recruitment Email Script_Participant Email Script	Recruitment Materials	23/Mar/2021	3
V3_Recruitment Social Media Script	Recruitment Materials	23/Mar/2021	3
V4_LOI and written consent form	Written Consent/Assent	23/Mar/2021	4

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Patterson , Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Molly-Gloria R. Harper
Post-secondary Education & Degrees:	University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2017-2022 Ph.D. University of Windsor Windsor, Ontario, Canada 2015-2017 M.A. University of Windsor Windsor, Ontario, Canada 2011-2015 B.A. [H]
Honours & Awards:	Province of Ontario Graduate Scholarship 2018-2019, 2020-2021 Building Brighter Futures Bursary IndSpire Program – Province of Ontario & Government of Canada 2019-2020, 2021-2022
Related Work Experience:	Instructor University of Western Ontario Winter 2022 (January-April) Editor-in-Chief, Journal for Social Thought Sociology Graduate Journal University of Western Ontario, Sociology Department 2018-2022 Research Assistant University of Western Ontario 2018-2022 Teaching Assistant University of Western Ontario 2017-2021 Graduate Assistant University of Windsor 2015-2017

Selected Publications:

Harper M.G., Quan-Haase A., & Hollingshead, W. (2022). Mobilizing social support online and offline: New and transferable digital life skills in the pre and post COVID-19 era. *First Monday, 27*(4), https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v27i4.12559

Quan-Haase, A. & Harper, M.G. (2022). Digital media use and social inclusion: A case study of East York older adults, In Tsatsou, P. (Ed.), *Digital Inclusion: Enhancing People's Social Inclusion and Welfare.*

Quan-Haase, A., Harper, M.G., & Wellman, B. (2021). The role of communication technology across the life course: A field guide to social support in East York, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 38*(12), 3497-3517.

Harper M.G., Wellman B., & Quan-Haase A. (2021). Older adults and information and communication technologies in the Global North, In Gu, D. & Dupre, M.E. (Eds), *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging,* Springer Nature. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1007/978-3-319-69892-2_902-1

Robinson, L., Schulz, J., Dunn, H. S., Casilli, A. A., Tubaro, P., Carvath, R., Chen, W., Wiest, J. B., Dodel, M., Stern, M. J., Ball, C., Huang, K.-T., Blank, G., Ragnedda, M., Ono, H., Hogan, B., Mesch, G. S., Cotten, S. R., Kretchmer, S. B., Hale, T. M., Drabowicz, T., Yan, P., Wellman, B., Harper, M.-G., Quan-Haase, A., & Khilnani, A. (2020). Digital inequalities 3.0: Emergent inequalities in the information age. *First Monday*, *25*(7). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v25i7.10844

Robinson, L., Schulz, J., Blank, G., Ragnedda, M., Ono, H., Hogan, B., Mesch, G., Cotten, S.R., Kretchmer, S.B., Hale, T.M., Drabowicz, T., Yan, P., Wellman, B., Harper, M.-G., Quan-Haase, A., Dunn, H.S., Casilli, A.A., Tubaro, P., Carveth, R., Chen, W., Dodel, M., Wiest, J.B., Ball, C., Huang, K.-T., Khilnani, A., & Stern, MJ. (2020), Digital inequalities 2.0: Legacy inequalities in the informational age, *First Monday*, 25(7). http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v25i7.10842

Wellman B., Quan-Haase A., & Harper M.G. (2019). The Networked Question in the Digital Age: How do individuals connect at different stages of the Life Course? *Network Science, 8*(3), 291-312, https://doi.org/10.1017/nws.2019.28