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Defining the Lines with iMPACTS: A Multi-Sectored Partnership Policy Model to Rehumanize Children's Online Communication ("iPMACTS Policy Model")

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iMPACTS Collaborations to Address Sexual Violence on Campus
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About the Series

Children and youth stand to be especially impacted by the attention economy of data-driven technologies, educational tools that support surveillance and data collection, and toxic online environments. Engaging with a broad network of interdisciplinary scholars, this project aims to understand and address the impact of media technologies on children and youth against a broader data privacy governance agenda. The project convenes leading experts, policymakers, and impacted stakeholders to question the challenges posed by digital technologies to children and youth.

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Preface

Shaheen Shariff, PhD, James McGill Professor

Online Realities for Children and Youth: I was commissioned by *Max Bell Institute of Public Policy* at McGill ("Max Bell") to write a paper on Children and Technologies, and include policy guidelines to address cyberbullying and online sexual violence drawing on learnings from two decades of my research at McGill University.

When I first began to research cyberbullying in 2004, boyd and Jenkins (2006) and Lankshear and Knobel (2008) had observed that technology is not dangerous for children. Rather, it is human behaviour and violent attitudes reflected in online communication that place children at risk. These scholars observed that children reap substantial benefits from engaging online. To a great extent, my co-author, Farah Roxanne Stonebanks and I, agree.

Leadership and Activism: Children are future leaders of society and have numerous valuable learning and activist opportunities on the Internet. Generations X, Y, and Z have access to seemingly infinite amounts of online knowledge and information about our world, its people, and cultures; the environment; our beautiful planet and its place in the universe because of scientific discoveries, evolving technologies and media tools available online. Moreover, young people have established through several social media hashtag movements noted in this paper, that they should not hesitate to hold government and educational institutions accountable for their actions or omissions. Young leaders have stood by their social conscience through activism relating to gender-based violence, police brutality, and racial injustice; and have expressed deep passion about issues of equality, justice, and the environment across the globe. Nonetheless, in this paper we argue that children need guidance as they navigate the blurred lines

between free expression, privacy, and socially responsible online discourse, due to unprecedented levels of divisive and offensive online content.

Empowering Children for Constructive Online Engagement: As they submerge themselves online, it is important to help young people navigate increasingly blurred lines between respectful, legally defensible, and inclusive online dialogues on one hand; and divisive, demeaning online interactions on the other. Our goal in this paper is to guide policy makers and educators to empower and equip children to achieve constructive and informed discussions, impactful partnerships, and civic collaboration, without being subjected to, participating in, or perpetrating cyberbullying. We have created models to help children define the lines and navigate a balance between democratic free speech and offensive online expressions that may not be legally defensible if challenged in court. To succeed, it is essential for policy makers, educators and children to better understand and confront nuanced contextual realities of contemporary online communication. Everyone needs to recognize these realities are not limited to peer bullying. In fact, powerful influences of an increasingly hostile and divisive socio-political virtual world filter into children's online experiences, which is gradually becoming normalized as generations grow up immersed in social media.

Importance of Context in 2020 – A Dystopian Reality: Our contemporary global and socio-political situation regrettably provides a dystopian backdrop to children's technology use. The research presented in this article has to be considered within this evolving backdrop. As a society, we currently face an imploding democratic world order that is rapidly polarized, protectionist, and precarious. We can no longer afford to ignore it, or pretend it doesn't exist, because much of it plays out online where children are most exposed to it. This evolution comes at the expense of constitutional and human rights, safety, equality, acceptance of diversity, and a civil, caring society.

Contemporary society has evolved rapidly and unrecognizably from that we knew a mere five years ago. Global society appears to have lost its way — especially its moral compass. While the Internet facilitates many facets of communication, it also brings into sharp focus the dark elements of society that seek to violate, destroy, and divide at any cost, compromising the truth with fake online news and misinformation, while reversing enormous democratic strides for equality, international collaboration, human rights, and civil society since the Second World War.

Pulling Out of the Online Swamp: Cyberbullying and other forms of online negativism are rooted in systemic and deeply embedded societal forms of discrimination (See Shariff, 2009, 2017; Keum & Miller, 2018). As mentioned above, the challenge in contemporary online society rests on finding ways to ensure children and youth are equipped to distinguish between truth and fake information; and between hate and compassion towards others. Sadly, the research highlighted in this paper indicates that many young people are side-tracked by peer pressure; normalized online jokes and offensive speech. Some might also be influenced by political leaders who devalue and undermine society's most vulnerable members, such as immigrant groups and people of color. This vulnerability is passed on to children from communities who may often be ostracized, dehumanized, and scapegoated online because of their gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability or disability. It is also a reflection of behaviors and attitudes that are modelled, tacitly sanctioned, and officially condoned.

I wish we did not have to paint this depressing picture! However, in 2020, acrimonious and unpleasant online interactions, sexual exploitation, child pornography; sexual harassment; access to violent adult pornography; intersecting forms of misogyny, homophobia, sexism, racism, xenophobia, and lack of compassion for disabled children have proliferated online at epidemic levels (MacKay, 2020; Peris, 2020; Katz 2020). As children have no choice but to use technology daily, they cannot help but witness, internalize, and normalize violent, unpleasant behaviors, and attitudes as socially acceptable (Poyntz & Beer, 2018).

The challenge in contemporary online society rests on finding ways to ensure children and youth are equipped to distinguish between truth and fake information; and between hate and compassion towards others.

Unearthing Roots of Discrimination to Reclaim Democratic Norms for Children: Thus, it is imperative and urgent that we address these roots effectively and sustainably, as social and political norms in society move away from democratic and human rights principals towards regressive, autocratic, protectionist norms grounded in hate and fear of difference. I have long emphasized that we need to move beyond a narrow focus on the *symptoms* of bullying and cyberbullying. It is one thing to provide statistics on aggression and how it is carried out on-and-off line (Modecki et al., 2014). To progress beyond this limitation, we must unearth, examine, and dismantle the intersecting and discriminatory *roots* of cyberbullying, just as

#MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter have done, and go further, to ensure sustained improvement and impact.

Defining the Lines with iMPACTS: A Multi-Sectored Partnership Policy Model to Rehumanize Children's Online Communication: To that end, after reviewing the research on cyberbullying, we share concept maps and policy guidelines emerging from two decades of that research, and frameworks that I developed and use for our current seven-year multi-partnered project on sexual violence and online sexual cyberbullying (iMPACTS). These multi-sectored partnership frameworks and concept models show greater promise of lifting children above the quicksands of online negativity. Our models and concept maps are grounded in, and apply student mentorship and agency. Our approach is different from "cancel culture," which has commendable goals to counter and erase scapegoating and demeaning of others by calling out abusive, violent posts, and discriminatory behaviors. Cancel culture can however, be counterproductive if the behavior to be cancelled is publicly criticized in equally offensive online posts or comments (Gallardo, 2017; Ge, 2020; Cheung, 2014). A culturally rich, critically informed, and multi-disciplinary, multi-sector partnership approach shows greater promise of long-term contributions to a future society rooted in, and embracing pluralism, environmental sustenance, compassion, dignity, kindness, and humanity. While I repeatedly cite these utopian sounding goals, we are convinced they will go further to help children grow up unscathed by the dystopia that is so pervasive in present-day society.

Overview of Research on Cyberbullying: Our paper begins with an overview of cyberbullying research over the last two decades, which Master's student and iMPACTS researcher Farah Roxanne Stonebanks has helped me compile. We have organized this overview to help readers better understand the trajectory and roots of cyberbullying, within the current global online context. Law student Kimia Towfigh has brought her editing and legal research skills to this endeavour, and her efficient contributions warrant acknowledgment.

Introduction and Background

As noted in the Preface, contemporary online engagement by children and youth takes place within a broader socio-political context, and is also influenced by internal psycho-social influences and peer relationships as children move into adolescence. While it is not within the scope of this paper to address all of these issues, it is important to highlight a few important considerations before embarking on our overview of the research on cyberbullying and online sexualized violence against teens.

Fictional Reality and Shattered Adolescent Dreams: Increased online learning has the advantage of keeping children safe at home; however, in many ways, the content students are exposed to online can bring greater challenges. These challenges can be overcome with informed support and guidance. We explain how and why — especially during pre-adolescence and teenage years — young people dream of a fictional reality where popularity and peer approval, reputation and acceptance are most valued in their lives, and how the Internet can increase these desires tenfold because an infinite number of strangers can join conversations without adequate privacy settings. Such dreams of popular acceptance can however, become quickly and painfully shattered when trolls join in and instigate cyberbullying, sexual extortion, and online hate; or if young girls or women become targets of non-consensual distribution of intimate images online. For example, female teens may send a photograph to a boyfriend trusting he will not share it. When that trust is breached and he posts it online, the consequences for these young women are devastating (See Shariff, 2017; See teaching video La Blague and The Cell Phone on www.mcgill.ca/definetheline). Ensuing online insults, denigration, teasing, harassment, and demeaning photographs or videos are not as easily removed

online, with long term consequences to victims' reputations, mental and physical health, confidence, and progress in school.

Officially Sanctioned Systemic Discrimination and Twitter Hate Storms: In 2020, we have witnessed political upheaval relating to systemic racism, police brutality, and Black Lives Matter protests in the United States, which have also filtered into Canada. Over the last four years, American populist president Donald Trump uses the highest presidential podium in the world as a Twitter bully pulpit to divide citizens, promulgate sexism, misogyny, hate and exclusion, racism, xenophobia; model disrespect and disdain for respectable international allies; and support alternative right extremism. He also uses Twitter and his campaign speeches to label peaceful protestors as extremist rioters. By comparison, Canada feels like a haven of peace and democracy, mutual respect for human rights and constitutional freedoms. We know, however, that in reality, Canada's track record with treatment of Indigenous peoples, and systemic racism by police against immigrant, racialized, and socio-economically marginalized groups has told a different story (Simpson, 2020).

As noted, Canadian children have easy online access to globally divisive and offensive social and news media, and many opportunities to engage in it. Statistics we present in the following sections confirm children's active participation in cyberbullying and related offensive uses of technology. We cannot protect children from exposure to unpleasant online communication that includes sexism, racism, homophobia other forms of discrimination (Reichelmann et al., 2020; Oksanen et al., 2014); however, we can implement models of leadership and communication to steer children away from such behaviour and teach them to recognize norms and ethics that support inclusion, equity, and civil society.

Three Key Steps in Cyberbullying and War: As part of this paper, we highlight and examine three key steps of online harassment or cyberbullying: 1) *dehumanization* of targeted individuals or groups; 2) *ostracism* from peer groups or communities; and 3) *scapegoating* of these individuals which allocates blame and justifies the ensuing violence. Our research indicates that these three steps are integral to and commonly applied in cases of political exclusion and isolation of ethnic groups during wars, genocide, and political upheavals (Akhavan, 2016; Fritsch et al., 2020). Few anti-bullying researchers have made this connection. Given the potentially serious implications of each step, it is essential we help children recognize and avoid them, given that a disturbing number of sexualized cyberbullying cases in Canada have resulted in teen suicides (Felt, 2017).

Rehumanizing Social Norms and Challenging Discrimination: Social media can be harnessed in many positive ways. Consider the success of the #MeToo movement. Within the last five years, many well-known celebrity sexual offenders have deservedly had their careers destroyed because of this feminist social media movement. The #BlackLivesMatter movement similarly engaged numerous young adults in active protests against police brutality in the U.S., Canada, and across Europe. These two examples illustrate ways that social media can mobilize thousands of people who have never met, but who share common values. Both movements, largely led by young people, drew global attention to systemic flaws, illustrating the power of online technologies. Children's exposure and access to sexual violence, violent pornography, and child pornography has also increased, and disturbingly thrives on the underground "dark web" (Horner, 2020). Fake news also proliferates online, often mistaken for the truth by younger, more gullible and less experienced users. This is compounded by the fact that social media sites are not always obliged to remove offensive posts (Spring, 2020).

COVID-19 Challenges: The invitation to write this article arrived during the first stage of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, when the majority of children were taught online from home during protective lockdowns to contain the first wave of the coronavirus. Now that schools are re-opening, there continue to be parental concerns that children could contract and bring home the virus, with the risk of repeated lockdowns. Hence, it is anticipated that a substantial amount of learning will continue online. While it is not within the scope of this article to focus directly on children and technology during the COVID-19 pandemic, we would be remiss to ignore its impact on children's social development and emotional well-being. Child advocates including UNICEF, the UN, Children's Rights agencies (UNICEF, 2020; UN, 2020) express concern that during the pandemic, lockdowns, and social distancing, domestic violence and child abuse are on the rise. Moreover, with longer hours spent online, children may experience the kinds of cyberbullying and harassment that we discuss in this paper. Suffice to say that we acknowledge the importance of face-to-face social interaction for children through social distancing, which will provide them with much-needed breaks from technology.

Below is an overview of youth and their social media usage as computer technologies emerged.

I. Overview of Youth and Social Media (1980–2020)

Over the last two decades, most children and teens ("Gens X to Z") grew up immersed in social media. Beginning in the 1980s, personal computers became more easily available and entered the homes of those who were able to afford them. This created the opening for Generation X (1960-1979) to utilize this technology in their everyday lives (Myers, 2016). However, it was not until the early 1990s that more homes were able to afford these personal computers, and the Internet became more available to the general population (Myers, 2016). Additionally, it was not until around 2004 when Web 2.0 made an appearance, changing the way people were able to interact online, moving from passive consumption to active creation of online content (Scanfeld et al., 2010). This 20-year timeframe between the introduction of the personal computer to the creation of a more active online experience produced what researchers now refer to as a "digital divide," highlighting the vast differences in use and knowledge of technology between adults (Generation X) and the younger generations (Generation Y and Z) of today (Bauman, 2010). Thus, while those in Generation X have witnessed the drastic evolution of personal-use technology and the Internet, younger generations have had the advantage of accessing these technologies at a much younger age — with at-home Internet use by children increasing from 22% during the 1990s, to 63% by 2003. (Myers, 2016).

Today, students from kindergarten through university represent the first generations to grow up with constant access to technology. Both Generation Y (1980-1994) and Generation Z (1995-2010) have spent their lives surrounded by and using computers, cellphones, video cameras, and other tools of the digital

age. At a global level, researchers have been able to track an increased Internet usage of 342.22% since 2000 (Valcke et al., 2011). Additionally, 80% of adolescents now own their own technology, primarily computers and cellphones, with even more teens being able to access technology at school, libraries, or after-school programs (Bauman, 2010). This rapid dissemination of digital technology during the last few decades has become an integral part of their social lives (Prensky, 2001; boyd & Jenkins, 2006; Ofcom, 2017; UNICEF, 2017; Peter et al., 2006; Livingstone, 2009; boyd, 2014). Leading the way into the uncharted territory of the Internet, these generations mark the first time a group has been so defined by their relationship to technology. This is also evidenced in catchy journalist-created titles of "Keyboard kids," "Cyberchildren," and "The Myspace Generation" (Montgomery, 2007). This "uncharted territory" is only accentuated by older and younger generations' differing understanding of how to conceptualize, use, and approach technology. Thus, while most adults have been able to master the use of computer technology compared to younger generations, their mastery is relatively superficial. For example, adults often struggle with the capacity and fluid nature of online spaces and are generally unsure about how they can "control" these spaces for their children (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

A. Dreams of a fictional reality and the addictive draw of popularity

Although the Internet provides valuable learning experiences and supports (Lankshear et al., 2008; Gee, 2010; boyd & Jenkins, 2016) and, as noted in the introduction, has supported important and successful social movements like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, negative online role models attract substantially more media and scholarly attention than positive adult models and supports (Mishna et al., 2011; Gordon-Messer et al., 2013; Munthe & Persson de Fine Licht, 2014; Bird et al., 2012; Strom et al, 2011; Ringrose et al, 2012). Social media intermediaries such as Facebook and Instagram have successfully harnessed young people's dreams of celebrity status with the "like" features; endorsement of selfies; friend and follower counts. The addictive draw of popularity and wide acceptance by peers provides a fictional sense of reality when the rumor mill is not at participants' expense, and when jokes and cyberbullying target others.

Adolescence is an important period of identity exploration, and presents a time where social belonging and reputation are critically important (Prout, 2005; Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004); thus, it is likely to assume that an adolescent's use of

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social media is connected to their personal self-construction. A key aspect of identity construction is a stable sense of self. Online platforms provide young people with the space, flexibility, and open access of social media, where they have time to build their online persona and individuality compared to their offline physical selves (Yau & Reich, 2018). Relying on peer feedback and validation in the absence of parental interference, online adolescent communities may consist of shallow relationships, but they allow participants complete control over self-presentation. This allows them to hold exaggerated conceptions of themselves that enhance their desire for popularity and admiration (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Yau & Reich, 2018). It is within this online playground that adolescents and youth build and maintain online intimacies and personas that provide them with social capital (Nilan et al., 2015).

Consequently, some adolescents construct their social capital by mocking peers who may be lower on the scale (e.g, classmates with fewer friends). Ultimately, bullying is a form of abuse based on power imbalances (Rigby, 2002). Research affirms this, as risk factors for cyberbullying tend to be social, as opposed to technological (Navarro et al., 2015; Schoffstall & Cohen, 2011). Moreover, adolescents with lower social status offline tend to be online victims more often than their peers (Shariff, 2009; 2015; Cassidy et al., 2009). Online bystanders often flock to perpetrators in an attempt to protect themselves from future online harassment, causing primary perpetrators to experience an increase in popularity (Nilan et al., 2015; Wegge et al., 2016; Olweus, 2001; Salmivalli et al., 1996). The effect of cyberbullying on social status is particularly strong because of the potential for wide distribution of postings which in turn, increase audiences. This can contribute to the popularity of perpetrators and further demean those selected for victimization (Wegge et al., 2016; DiGiulio, 2001; Katch, 2001; Olweus, 2001). It is this strong allure and potential to build and increase online social capital that causes even online victims to continuously return to this cyberspace (Nilan et al., 2015).

B. Shattered online status

Although social media use is not detrimental in and of itself, fictional realities of belonging, acceptance, and success can be shattered instantly when the very same friend groups switch roles, ostracize, and engage in cyberbullying and scapegoating. Such acts are often joined by online trolls and strangers, who

revel in offensive postings. Both the risk of cyberbullying and the opportunity of popularity have been found to increase the more time a child spends online (Livingstone et al., 2011). This is, in part, due to the creation of Web 2.0, which allows youth to use the Internet as digital actors, with the ability to create, explore, share, and comment online, as opposed to use its resources simply as passive recipients (Buckingham, 2007a; Livingstone, 2009). Earlier scholarship observed that adolescents who use social media more frequently place themselves at a higher risk of being cyber-victimized, warning that heightened engagement in "digital status seeking" online behaviour can lend itself to negative psychological consequences and victimization (Longobardi et al., 2020). Online popularity itself, through increased social status, online visibility, and social dominance, may be a risk factor for cyber-victimization. Adolescents who wish to maintain their social status may attempt to do so through aggressive social strategies, which can result in increased situations of peer conflict (Longobardi et al., 2020). Rival popular peers, as well as lower-in-popularity peers may attack popular youth online in an attempt to demonstrate their own power and influence. Cyberaggression poses less risk of immediate retaliation, allowing rivals to feel safer to resort to hostility and increase the damage caused to the victim (Ranney & Troop-Gordon, 2020).

More worrisome is the fact that the need for online popularity may lead some young people to accept strangers as online "friends" in order to increase their social networks. This can, in turn, increase their chances of interacting with hostile peers or sexual predators (Longobardi et al., 2020). Allowing strangers greater access to personal information through the act of accepting them as online "friends" has been found to increase unwanted contact, harassment, sexual advances, and overall cyberstalking victimization (Reyns et al., 2011). Reyns et al (2011) report a relationship between online popularity among teens and increased cyberaggression, through for example, the number of photos posted online, the number of daily social network updates, and the number of social networking accounts, bringing precarious highs and lows to those who rely on peer approval for their self-esteem and confidence (Reyns et al., 2011).

C. Mental health and suicide

Bullying and cyberbullying have contributed to tragic teenage suicides and mental health issues among victims and survivors, as well as lawsuits and school dropouts. Studies uncovered a significant relationship between an involvement with cyberbullying and strains on youths' mental health (Gruber & Fineran, 2008; Nixon, 2014; Wright & Wachs, 2019). Specifically, results from studies found that

higher levels of cyberbullying victimization often lead to increased feelings of depression, loneliness, hopelessness, insecurity, anxiety, and embarrassment (Gruber & Fineran, 2008; Nixon, 2014; Wright & Wachs, 2019). Cyberbullying has also been conceptualized as a significant stressor within victims' lives. It has been suggested that cyberbullying may in fact be more stressful than traditional, offline bullying, due in part to the higher chance of perpetrator anonymity and its 24 hour persistence online (Nixon, 2014). Moreover, victims were found to have higher rates of school functioning difficulties and issues with their academic performances, causing their online concerns to seep into their offline day-to-day lives (Wright & Wachs, 2019; Egeberg et al., 2016). The forms of negative effects that relate to cyber harassment, such as decreased self-worth and loneliness, have also been linked as precursors to elevated suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

It has been suggested that cyberbullying may in fact be more stressful than traditional, offline bullying, due in part to the higher chance of perpetrator anonymity and its 24 hour persistence online.

D. Issues of safety and privacy

Online engagement by Gens X and Z during the Social Media Decades (SMD) has drawn significant scholarly debate from multi-disciplinary perspectives on issues of safety, privacy, protection, risks and harm relating to the proliferation of cyberbullying, offensive and hateful social media posts and conversations. Despite its relatively recent emergence, cyberbullying swiftly become a serious public health concern worldwide (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2015). Research on the emergence of social networking sites, such as Facebook and Instagram around 2003-2004, found engagement on those sites to be largely associated with experiences of cyberbullying victimization among adolescents (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2015). Online contact through social media can result in a variety of risk situations, with youth engaging in online risk behaviours such as sharing too much personal information including passwords and engaging with unknown persons who could place them at risk for online extortion and exploitation (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2015; Valcke et al., 2011).

E. On-and-off line bullying – The spillover reality

While some adults may contract and view on-and-offline behaviours and relationships as separate from one another, most adolescents do not view them through a clear divide (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). Most view their digital identities as inseparable from their physical identities (Lankshear et al., 2008), and peer relationships spillover and exist in both online and offline formats. Several case examples of physical bullying, beatings, and sexual assault were video-taped and distributed online. In 2011 a 16-year-old female teen was gang-raped in a barn after a party. A 16-year-old boy filmed the rape and instead of sending it to the police, passed it to an older friend to post on Facebook. The video spread virally online resulting in criminal charges against the boy who filmed it, with less attention paid to the males who sexually assaulted the girl. Notably, the judge in the case sentenced the videographer to one year of community service and asked him to write a letter about the "evils of the Internet" again ignoring the fact that the girl had been sexually violated and humiliated online. By blaming the Internet for the boy's behavior, the Judge minimized the seriousness of the rape and the online posting of it (see discussion in Shariff, 2017).

A similar incident occurred in Iowa in 2014, when high school students recorded a video of themselves beating a 16-year-old peer and posted the video on Facebook (Augustine, 2014). The case of David Knight was one of the first that reflected transition from physical bullying to the online forum. David was not only physically bullied (teased, kicked, punched, etc.) throughout his high school years, but his peers created a website about this humiliation that drew hostile trolling comments from Thailand. (Leishman, 2002). David and his family unsuccessfully sued his school for failing to prevent the abuse because bullying and cyberbullying were not taken as seriously by schools or courts when the phenomenon first emerged.

F. Cyberbullying crossing into physical contexts

Cyberbullying and social media relationships can also cross over into social relationships in physical contexts, whereby youth targeted by sexist cyberbullying may also be subjected to physical assault, rape, non-consensual distribution of intimate images; practical jokes; demeaning slurs and sexual harassment. This can be found within the tragic case of Jessica Logan, who committed suicide at the age of

18 after allegedly suffering harassment from her school peers after her ex-boyfriend publicly shared a nude photo of her from the neck down. The photo spread across the school and caused students to chastise Jessica with nicknames and derogatory remarks, throw things at her while at school and at her graduation, and harass her by phone and online (*Logan v. Sycamore Community School*, 2011). In a study by Reyns et al. (2013), it was found that sexting was associated with a higher probability of suffering from cybervictimization through 1) engaging in harassment, 2) contacting victims after they asked the perpetrator not to do so, 3) comitting unwanted sexual contact and, 4) threatening victims with violence. The technical advancements that have allowed for the fast and easy sharing of sexual content has made it possible for sexual content to be shared with unintended third parties without the consent of the victim, allowing an increase in online victimization and difficulties of the victims' escape (Gámez-Guadix & Mateos-Pérez, 2019).

G. "Just jokes" dehumanize

Online bullying does contain distinct attributes that differ from offline bullying, such as asynchronous communication, an absence of time and space constraints, easier access to anonymity, a potentially infinite audience of bystanders, an inability to observe the victims' immediate reaction, and an altered balance of power (Bauman, 2010; Davis et al., 2015). However, there are still similarities between these two forms of bullying. For instance, dynamics between the victim and perpetrator(s) often reflect their offline peer dynamics. Nevertheless, the perceived anonymity on the side of the perpetrator can often reduce their social inhibitions (Bauman, 2010; Davis et al., 2015). For example, a study by Patchin and Hinduja (2006) reported that 37% of teens in their survey indicated they had said things electronically that they would never say in person. It is the lowering of social inhibitions that allows perpetrators to rationalize their actions as "just having fun" or "just joking", as their victim(s) reaction is unknown (Bauman, 2010). A significant portion of these jokes and fun are rooted in discrimination with the objective to dehumanize the victim and blame them for something deemed worth laughing at (such as an accent, color of skin, mode of dress, disability or ability) (Shariff, 2017). The increased anonymity can also increase levels of fear and insecurity, as anyone in a victims' social circle could be the perpetrator (Badiuk, 2006; Mishna et al., 2009; Dooley et al., 2009; Nocentini et al., 2010). This also presents challenges for schools attempting to prevent any cyberbullying that may be taking place between their students (Harmon, 2004).

H. Prevalence of cyberbullying

Educators and researchers are understandably concerned that cyberbullying is growing faster than we can effectively respond (Bauman, 2010). One study found that online bullying had increased by 83% over the last decade between 10–17-year-olds in the US (Finkelhor, 2013). Another study found that 49% of 14–24-year-olds in the US stated they had experienced abuse through social media (Davis et al., 2015). Canadian research has also found that around 54% of 12–13-year-olds report being victims of cyberbullying (Valcke et al., 2011). In other forms of cyber-risks, research done by Ybarra, Leaf, and Diener West (2004) found that 12% of male and 27% of female internet users (10–17 years-old) experience at least one case of sexual soliciting online (Valcke et al., 2011). There are also wide variations in online cyberbullying and risk rates found in studies, partially due to the lack of scholarly agreement on its precise definition (Davis et al., 2015).

I. Intersectional impacts

Youth who identify as sexual and racial minorities suffer from heightened amounts of online harassment compared to peers, with only one stigmatized identity (Ash-Houchen & Lo, 2018). Elsewhere (Shariff, 2008-2017) highlights that cyberbullying is informed by deeply embedded, intersecting, and interlocking forms of discrimination (sexism, misogyny, homophobia, racism, xenophobia, and demeaning of people with disabilities) that marginalize some Gens Y and Z individuals more than others. For example, various studies have shown that youth with sexual minority status (referring broadly to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescents) are bullied and victimized in schools at disproportionate rates when compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Abreu & Kenny, 2017; Ash-Houchen & Lo, 2018; Mennicke et al., 2020; Chu, 2005; Harmon, 2004; Leishman, 2002). In fact, in terms of cyberbullying, LGBTQ2+ youth are among one of the most vulnerable populations – sexual minority students report rates of being bullied ranging from 19–88%, rates which are nearly double that of their heterosexual peers (Abreu & Kenny, 2017; Ash-Houchen & Lo, 2018; Mennicke et al., 2020; Schuster et al., 2015).

Youth have also reported that non-conforming gender expression is one of the most common targets of online bullying — with girls and boys alike reporting cyber aggression based on strict behavioural and visual gender norms (Sylwander, 2019). Peer pressure is rampant among male youth as well, especially among those who do not conform to the heteronormative standards (Pascoe, 2007). This can lead some

to engage in sexual harassment of women and homophobic attacks on male peers in order to better assert their heterosexuality (Frank, 1996; Bender, 2001).

In terms of sexism and misogyny, many women have recently been speaking out against the gendered cyber-harassment and misogyny that has become part of the everyday experience for them online (Jane, 2016; Brail, 1996; Finn, 2004; Herring, 2002). While this has been occurring since the early days of the Internet, it was not until the #MeToo movement began, that women and girls began to disclose the extent of the rape threats and sexualized rage they have, and continue to, receive (Jane, 2016; Garcia & Vemuri, 2017). And while men are more likely to receive online hate through name-calling and embarrassment, young women are much more vulnerable to severe forms of cyber abuse, such as sexual harassment, stalking, and non-consensual online distribution of intimate images (Jane, 2016; Adam, 2001; Adam, 2002; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002; Mackinnon, 2001). Even among youth, girls are targeted for online harassment more often than boys (Finkelhor et al., 2000). Online violence often reinforces social gender inequalities (Herring, 2002).

At this point it is important to highlight three key steps that inform cyberbullying and which ironically, are also central to ways in which certain ethnic groups are isolated, victim blamed, and subjected to ethnic cleansing during political wars and upheavals. Consider the following common criteria, and the subtle ways in which individuals and groups can be singled out in order for some to maintain power and to justify their violence against them. Prior to existence of the Internet, it was through the use of radio, television, and print-media that perpetrators could dehumanize, ostracize, and scapegoat. In contemporary society, social media, especially Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram can drum up falsehoods and hostilities very quickly.

II. Dehumanizing, Ostracism and Scapegoating

A. Fictional realities, power, popularity, and the “Age of Twitter”

Throughout history, we have witnessed various ethnic groups singled out and blamed for their culture, language, religion, appearance, abilities and disabilities, economic class and caste, language, accent, and other factors. In order to justify the harm that follows, those who instigate violence against such individuals are afraid of relinquishing power. To maintain power, group leaders might target visible minority groups and create a fear of difference in the minds of peers and community — a fear that newcomers or visible minorities might present a threat to the mainstream way of life and public safety, people’s well-being or popularity; a threat they will lose their land, fame, money; that newcomers will disrupt their families; challenge their religious values; water down their ethnicity through marriage. In terms of identity construction, power, and popularity, people might be picked on for not being good looking enough; speaking with an accent and dressing differently; or for belonging to a different socio-economic class. As these “grown up” attitudes and behaviors are modelled on-and-offline, they can be internalized and mirrored by children and adolescents, particularly as young people attempt to construct popular online identities and decide who will make them powerful and who could drag them down. This is especially so when youth are online with minimal parental or teacher supervision. Children and teens from marginalized groups are not exempt, and tend to bear the larger burden of intersectional online victimization among young people. As evidenced below, children are often targeted

for intersecting characteristics based on race, gender, sexual orientation, abilities and disabilities, religion, appearance, and accent, *inter alia*.

The physical and online adult world that created social media and also populates it, sets the standard for normalizing high levels of scapegoating, violence, discrimination, online hate, violent pornography, and offensive online content that young people are exposed to constantly. According to the Pew Research Center, 62% of adults in the United States get their news from social media (Gotfried & Shearer, 2017). Some have referred to this as a fundamental shift in which we are turning towards an "Age of Twitter", changing our dominant mode of public discourse and news sharing (Ott, 2017). The concern behind this is that social media outlets will often share specific, targeted information to its users based on their personal tendencies — causing individuals to exist within an online world filled with only what they want to hear; creating echo chambers of one-sided or mis-information that only work to reaffirm existing beliefs (Ott, 2017). This is especially concerning when the echo chambers are promoting beliefs that are derogatory and harmful. Elsewhere, (Shariff, 2020) points to evidence that in 2020, Hollywood fiction is more believable than the divisive implosion of democracy we confront today. We witness blatant and unapologetic injustices by authorities on the news daily. While racism persisted in liberal democracies for many generations, officially sanctioned hate and xenophobia; dehumanization and discrimination escalated exponentially in the last five years (Dietzel, Shariff, & Towfigh, 2021).

As these "grown up" attitudes and behaviors are modelled on-and-offline, they can be internalized and mirrored by children and adolescents, particularly as young people attempt to construct popular online identities and decide who will make them powerful and who could drag them down.

Step 1: Dehumanizing

The process of allocating blame to targeted victims is deliberately meant to "dehumanize" and make victims appear less than human. This in turn facilitates the perpetrator's reasoning to justify the harm and convince others to join in the victimization. For example, in the 1990s, a high-profile bullying case in a British Columbia school resulted in the murder of Reena Virk. Reena was a South

Indian teenager. She was overweight and not accepted within her peer group of classmates in Victoria (Yourex-West, 2019). Desperate to belong, Reena borrowed a classmate's diary and began to phone the boys listed in it, as a joke. Kelly Ellard, the diary's owner convinced her friends that Reena deserved a beating. The group tricked her into meeting them one evening by the local corner store, and followed to beat her, chase her, burn her with cigarettes, drag her into the water, and hold her head underwater until she drowned. Her friend Warren Glawotzki aided in the murder and a code of silence was maintained by all of her classmates for a week until Reena's body was found. Reports of the court case indicated that the lawyer for the defence also dehumanized Reena by describing her as "hairy" and "dark" (Batacharya, 2000). Ultimately, Kelly Ellard and Warren Glowatski went to prison for Reena's murder (*R. v. Ellard*; Shariff, 2003 unpublished dissertation). Online, this type of dehumanizing activity often spreads through the circulation of unapproved GIFs, unflattering photographs, non-consensual distribution of intimate images; videos of sexual assault; shared jokes and comments. They are difficult to remove, as they can be saved on people's computers and reappear many years later.

Step 2: Ostracism

As explained earlier, adolescents need to belong to peer groups and value their acceptance because it shapes their self-image and identity (Moran et al., 2017; Helseth & Misvaer, 2010; Wang et al., 2018). In online situations, victims can be shunned and ostracized from acceptance into social media groups. If they remain, they can experience a barrage of insults and demeaning jokes, GIFs, practical jokes, and videos. Similarly, in political situations, once the process of dehumanization is achieved successfully, communities and individuals can be ostracized and separated, with their freedom limited, possessions taken, and membership in peer groups cut-off. They are blamed for whatever flaw it is that "dehumanizes" them from the mainstream culture or peer group, justifying violence against them because the instigator says they deserve it.

Step 3: Scapegoating justifies the violence

As with Reena, once the individual or community is dehumanized and punished, their scapegoating justifies the harm as deserving — or as if they brought it on themselves. This occurrence is similar to in ethnic cleansing during wartime — for instance, Hitler dehumanized and separated Jewish people by justifying that they deserved the blame because they were wealthy, convincing his followers that

they deserved the Holocaust. More recently, Rohingyas, a Muslim minority group in Myanmar have been dehumanized and killed; their women and children raped and driven out because they were of a different religion and economically poor; the Yazidis in Syria were overrun by ISIS, their men killed and women captured as sex slaves because they were not Muslim. Other genocides have been carried out against Asians in Uganda because they were merchants; in Rwanda between Tutsis and Hutus because of ethnic differences; in Bosnia where women and girls were raped because of their religious differences. Regrettably, the list does not end here. Similarly, in many countries, LGBTQ2+ people are dehumanized and targeted for their sexual orientation and blamed for their potential to impact procreation (Shariff, Case and Manley-Casimir, 2001). Schools teach very little about these histories, or explain the motivations behind these forms of ethnic cleansing.

We make these disturbing analogies because this type of cruelty and scapegoating is reflected in many online relationships among children and teens, sometime with devastating and life-threatening consequences. Too many Canadian teenagers, including Amanda Todd, Rehtaeh Parsons and Hamed Nastoh, among others, committed suicide as a result of incessant ostracism and victimization by classmates and online trolls (Felt, 2017). Peers and trolls can send strong messages via Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and other social media platforms against scapegoated children and teens. In the adult world, as among adolescents, dehumanizing and ostracism provide added license and tacit permission for people to justify harm, especially when hate is increasingly sanctioned by political leaders.

B. Officially sanctioned hate and othering

Online hate consistently targets victims that are identified as “other,” with most aggression instigated through expectations of white middle-class heteronormativity (Sylwander, 2019; Katch, 2001; Olweus, 2001; Salmivalli, 2001). A clear example of an instigator of officially sanctioned online hate (who is by no means the only instigator of hate) is Donald Trump, the current American President who rails against Mexicans, Muslims, Asians, and international leaders — actions which are witnessed on a daily basis worldwide. This purposeful bully pulpit on Twitter, intended to divide, conquer, and spread fake information, can be and often is, mirrored and mimicked, as fear of those who are different spreads populism. Trump’s popular use of the term “political incorrectness” within his politics has led to a means whereby racism and bigotry can now be communicated on the frontstage of social media and political discourse.

Consider his derogatory claims of Mexico sending immigrants "with lots of problems" to the United States, bringing crime and drugs with them. Trump's description of Mexicans as "murderers and rapists" has dehumanized and created a fear of Mexican migrants, justifying separation of children from adults, where children in placed cages and orphaned while parents were deported. His descriptions of Muslims as "animals" and of neo-Nazis as "very fine people," and strong educated women as "nasty," send strong messages through social media regarding members of society he values and which members in his mind, deserve to be "punished," scapegoated, and ostracized. These are the messages that children and teens watch, hear, absorb, and can imitate very quickly (Shariff, 2017; 2009). An overt pro-white worldview can be disguised as "political incorrectness" in Trump's political context — communicated as non-racially motivated truth-telling (Gantt Shafer, 2017). It is this concept of "political incorrectness" that has allowed pro-white supporters to feel safer and validated in sharing their beliefs about race — many chanting terms such as "ten feet higher" for the wall to keep Mexicans out of the U.S. Alternately, it has also been suggested that ideas such as anti-racism, Black Lives Matter, and gender equality represent extreme left-wing philosophies that threaten American safety and way of life (Gantt Shafer, 2017). This notion has been widely used in the 2020 Republican Convention to convince voters that Democrats are extremists (Epstein & Qiu, 2019).

While the Internet has allowed adolescents and youth to form inter-ethnic relationships in ethnically diverse contexts, as we have noted earlier, it can also subject students to peer ethnic discrimination, defined as experiencing negative treatment by peers due to their membership within an ethnic group.

C. Online hate normalized by children

Official sanctioning of online hate and hate tweets by leaders like Trump fuel confidence in those that prefer to spread discrimination and division. Children and teens quickly figure out what messages and put-downs have the most devastating effects on people they do not like. They also realize the power of the online forums to spread their messages to infinite audiences. These expectations can also be the cause of the higher risk of victimization for visible racial minority children

(Larochette, 2009; Wason-Ellam, 1996). While the Internet has allowed adolescents and youth to form inter-ethnic relationships in ethnically diverse contexts, as we have noted earlier, it can also subject students to peer ethnic discrimination, defined as experiencing negative treatment by peers due to their membership within an ethnic group (Bellmore et al., 2012). Many studies agree that the most frequent attribute of victims is their "difference" from perpetrators: in appearance, home country, skin colour, religion, etc. (Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al., 2019). This form of ethnic discrimination is especially concerning during adolescence, as youth attempt to form social relationships, attain peer acceptance, and maintain their own ethnic identity and traditions (Bellmore et al., 2012).

D. Robotic and rote normalization of online hate and violence

It is unsafe to dismiss and view Trump's impulsive online statements as the sexist, racist, homophobic, and xenophobic thoughts of only one individual. As the most senior leader in the free world, his podium gives license to ideas and ensuring behaviors. His ideas spread; they teach individuals to see others as less-than-human; they also spread hate and violence (Ott, 2017). We need to be mindful at all times that all of this on-and off-line negativity is witnessed and normalized by Gens X and Z regularly. Consider the artificial intelligence robot "Tay", who was engineered by Microsoft and placed on Twitter to learn how to speak like a teenage girl through interacting with real humans online. While beginning her life online learning millennial slang and talking about pop stars such as Taylor Swift and Miley Cyrus, in just under 24 hours Tay quickly began tweeting out statuses praising Hitler and spewing racism and hate (Horton, 2016). Soon after Tay was shut down by Microsoft, one Twitter user questioned "So the robot repeated what society taught it and you think the robot needs fixing?" (Ott, 2017). Hateful and harmful online messages are not originated online and do not exist in a bubble separated from our offline world; they are embedded within our systemic political structures (Shariff & Johnny, 2007). Social influences and pop culture hold wide effects on bullying and online experiences as youth take in information on gender dynamics, rape culture, misogyny, and homophobia (Varjas et al., 2013; MacKay, 2013; Bailey & Steeves, 2013; Wade & Beran, 2011; Ybarra et al., 2006).

III. Legal Responses to Teen Suicides

Increasing incidents of cyberbullying maintained public attention and demanded accountability from parents, educators, and government, especially as increasing numbers of youth described online bullying as a routine and an inevitable feature of social media (Choo, 2015; Seidman, 2012; Lokeinsky, 2012).

As a result of media attention to high profile cases of teenagers taking their own lives due to online mistreatment, a number of states in the U.S., Canadian provinces, and the Canadian government, passed legislation and handled lawsuits, drawing focused attention to the pain that pre-adolescents and teens experience as a result of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; *Logan v. Sycamore Community School*, 2011; Ruedy, 2008).

A. American context

Consider the case of American teen Megan Meier. Megan was a 13-year-old middle-school girl who met an online peer named Josh in September 2006 from her MySpace profile. While their relationship began in a positive manner, Josh quickly began writing statements on her MySpace profile such as “the world would be a better place without you.” On October 2006, only one month after beginning their online communication, Megan took her own life in her bedroom. Public outrage quickly spread as the news that Josh was in fact Lori Drew, the 47-year-old mother of Megan’s friend. Outrage increased as it became apparent that Lori Drew would escape criminal prosecution as she did not break any existing laws through

her online communication with Megan — laws that would later be passed in her hometown of Dardenne Prairie, Missouri in response to her suicide (Ruedy, 2008).

One of the first widely broadcasted cases in the U.S. was the death of Ryan Halligan in October 2003. Halligan suffered years of online harassment from peers who called him gay. A female peer also pretended to like him only to publicly humiliate him, and another peer encouraged him to commit suicide. In response, Halligan's father began lobbying for cyberbullying legislation in Vermont (Felt, 2015). The previously discussed case of Megan Meier also brought the spotlight on cyberbullying and gained international attention, largely due to the outrage the public had on the lack of charges and consequences to Lori Drew. Legislation known as the "Megan Meier Act," was created out of public outrage. Unfortunately, the bill died at the committee stage. Nonetheless, it was the first push for a national response to cyberbullying (Felt, 2015). This increase in media attention created a shift in the public's understanding of the consequences of cyberbullying. While cyberbullying was often previously shrugged off as a part of growing up (Campbell, 2005; Limber & Small, 2003) and physical bullying was perceived to be a greater risk because of the potential of physical versus emotional harm (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Monks & Smith, 2006), media attention to the devastation caused by cyberbullying began to be taken more seriously by governments, courts, and schools (Felt, 2015). People realized that cyberbullying was a global phenomenon, reaching a wide variety of audiences (Senoo, 2007; Zhang & Wei, 2007; Bartlett, 2007; Chung, 2007). Thus, a global awareness of the existence of the problem grew, with cases of cyberbully-related death occurring internationally in Japan, China, Canada, India, Australia, England, and the United States (Felt, 2015).

B. Canadian context

Canada's perception of cyberbullying followed a similar path as that of the United States. Although cyberbullying had been researched and debated in Canada since 2004 (Shariff, 2008-09; Cappadocia et al., 2013; Beran, et al., 2012) it was the widely reported suicides of Amanda Todd in 2012 and Rehtaeh Parsons in 2013 that brought sexualized cyberbullying into the spotlight. Todd suffered sexual extortion and harassment by a man from the Netherlands who had taken an online photo of her shirtless. When she refused to send more pictures, he shared it with her peers, who incessantly engaged in cyberbullying. Although she changed schools several times, her perpetrator would locate her and forward the image to her new classmates, where the cyberbullying began again (Grenoble, 2012; Hager et al., 2014). Even after her death, trolls posted derogatory comments about the

manner in which she committed suicide on her Facebook page. The media made a poor decision in providing the trolls a platform by repeatedly highlighting the offensive Facebook posts in the news. This, in our opinion, had the consequence of revictimizing Amanda even in death.

C. Legislation on sexualized cyberbullying and non-consensual distribution of intimate images

At the age of 15, Rehtaeh Parsons was drugged and raped, and images of her sexual assault were subsequently distributed throughout her school, triggering an influx of derogatory comments both on and offline (Felt, 2015). Both cases, equally tragic, led to local legislative changes, beginning with the 2012 Report of the Nova Scotia Task Force on Cyberbullying, entitled "Respectful and Responsible Relationships: There's No App for That;" the 2012 report entitled "Cyberbullying Hurts: Respect for Rights in the Digital Age" and the CCSO Cyber-crime Working Group's 2013 Report, subtitled "Cyberbullying and the Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images" (Cartwright, 2016; Felt, 2015). The *Nova Scotia Cyber-Safety Act* helped to create an online version of a restraining order called a "protection order", to assist in situations where the perpetrator was unidentifiable and/or locatable. It allowed victims to apply for protection without needing to notify their perpetrator, and by identifying them though an email, ISP, or webpage address (Cartwright, 2016). However, the *Act* was overturned as unconstitutional by Justice Glen MacDougall of the Nova Scotia Supreme Court, who likened its definition of cyberbullying as a "colossal failure" for violating freedom of expression guaranteed by section 2(b) of the Canadian *Charter* (*Crouch v Snell*, 2015). As privacy lawyer David Fraser explained, the definition of cyberbullying was so broad that "it would include anything said or done online that could hurt somebody's feelings" (Laroche, 2017). As such, the *Act* was deemed too arbitrary to meet its legislative objectives of cyberbullying prevention, and thus disproportionately limited the well-established *Charter* principle of freedom of expression.

The *Act* was later replaced by Bill-27, the *Intimate Images and Cyber-Protection Act*, which narrows the definition of cyberbullying and provides individual victims the option to seek recourse through the court system. Despite the constitutional shortcomings of the previous Act, which infringed the rights of those accused of cyberbullying, critics of Bill-27 claim that the new Act inadequately protects victims for fear of violating constitutional rights (Laroche, 2017). As such, a

proportionate balance between protecting victims' rights and the rights of alleged offenders has arguably not yet been established by Canadian legislation.

As such, the Act was deemed too arbitrary to meet its legislative objectives of cyberbullying prevention, and thus disproportionately limited the well-established Charter principle of freedom of expression.

At the federal level, the *Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act* (Bill C-13) presents an effort to fill a legislative gap and criminalize cyberbullying. The *Act* effectively introduces a hybrid offence into the *Criminal Code* for publishing intimate images of a person without their prior consent (section 162.1). Specifically, as per the amendments, it is an offence to distribute "an intimate image of a person knowing that the person depicted in the image did not give their consent to the conduct, or being reckless as to whether or not that person gave their consent" (*Criminal Code*, section 162.1). Perpetrators that are found guilty under this provision may be held liable to imprisonment for a term of up to five years and may be subject to court orders limiting their internet use. Despite the *Act*'s intention to address cyberbullying, promote public safety, and implement Canada's international treaty obligations regarding cybercrime (i.e., Canada's accession to the *Convention on Cybercrime*, 2001), some scholars believe that section 163.1 is too blunt an instrument to address the core behavior at issue, particularly where perpetrators are also minors under the age of 18 (Department of Justice, 2017). Moreover, existing criminal offences are not adequately responsive to the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, and responses focused on prosecuting distributors or compensating victims for harms suffered do not always remove intimate images from websites (Katz, 2020).

Apart from seeking legal recourse through criminal proceedings, victims of non-consensual image distribution may also seek civil remedies under the tort of defamation. In the Supreme Court of Canada case *A.B. Bragg Communications Inc.*, a 15-year-old girl's picture was used without her consent on a fake Facebook profile, along with commentary about her appearance with sexually explicit references. Subsequently, her father brought an application for an order requesting the internet provider to disclose the identity of the person who used the IP address to publish the profile, so that a defendant could be identified for an action in defamation. The plaintiff also asked for permission to anonymously seek the

identity of the creator of the profile and for a publication ban on the content of the profile. The complex legal issue that this case presents includes maintaining an appropriate balance between the open court principle and freedom of the press on the one hand, while also protecting the well-being and anonymity of the victim on the other hand.

In its analysis, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized the inherent vulnerability of children and the psychological toxicity of cyberbullying, while also asserting that young victims of sexualized bullying are particularly vulnerable to harms of revictimization upon publication. According to the Court, such issues ultimately outweighed concerns of the open court principle and media rights, which were minimally infringed given the context of the case. As such, the girl's anonymous legal pursuit of the identity of her cyberbully was granted. Overall, this case ultimately demonstrates that the interests of privacy and protection of children from cyberbullying are "sufficiently compelling" to warrant restrictions on freedom of the press and open courts. As such, victims of cyberbullying in Canada who wish to seek civil recourse for harms suffered can avoid the obstacle of public self-identification during legal proceedings and diminish risks of re-victimization.

D. School response

In 2012, the National Assembly of Quebec passed Bill-56, *An Act to prevent and stop bullying and violence in schools* to increase accountability with respect to bullying and violence in schools. This legislation effectively stipulates that schools must provide safe and healthy environments for children, allowing each student to realize their full potential. Consequently, schools are obligated to formulate anti-bullying and anti-violence plans, while also establishing procedures for reporting the use of social media or communication technologies for cyberbullying purposes. Moreover, in their annual reports, schools are also required to state the number of complaints and corrective measures subsequently taken.

Schools hold a responsibility to ensure that all students are able to attend without fear and intimidation, and this responsibility needs to extend to their use of the school network and mobile devices as they communicate between their peers.

Despite the commendable goals of Bill-56, some critics point out that legislative measures are not enough to address the root causes of bullying. Consequently,

laws cannot be a substitute for the community level involvement needed to address bullying and violence in schools (Mitchell, 2012). Indeed, legislation can codify responsibilities and expectations of students but may not necessarily change bullying behaviour (Mitchell, 2012). Moreover, a recent survey of American legislation concluded that comprehensive anti-bullying laws are not sufficient to significantly affect rates of bullying and cyberbullying among LGBTQ2+ teenagers (Waldman, 2017). Rather, social and legal commitments to equality present a more cohesive means to combat bullying and harassment.

Due to the scale and influx of negative outcomes through online harassment, considerable emphasis has been placed on creating and implementing anti-bullying programs within public schools. Unfortunately, despite the time and effort that has been devoted to developing programs, writing articles, and delivering workshops and speeches, the issue continues to exist, as research on the effectiveness of these programs and workshops are still not well understood or followed (Beale & Hall, 2007; Machmutow et al., 2012). Schools hold a responsibility to ensure that all students are able to attend without fear and intimidation, and this responsibility needs to extend to their use of the school network and mobile devices as they communicate between their peers (Beale & Hall, 2007). Technology provides an effective screen that many youths can utilize in order to evade accountability for their action. This factor is what causes cyberbullying to be popular among some students, as they can attack others with a lowered fear of being caught. Anonymity on the internet is also one of the biggest challenges that schools face as they attempt to stop and prevent cyber harassment.

As we have already emphasized, the primary challenge in reducing and preventing cyberbullying is the fact that bullying is not considered to be rooted in discrimination. Hence the deeply ingrained systemic forms of sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and racism *inter alia*, are rarely addressed in anti-bullying programs. For example, while U.S. First Lady Melania Trump's attempts to address cyberbullying among children using her motto "Be Best" are laudable, she is often criticized for her hypocrisy, because children cannot "Be Best" when her spouse, a global leader, spouts and models hate through his Twitter platform every day. Hence, while the intentions of many schools and policymakers to address cyberbullying are noble, many approaches to addressing it are superficial and ineffective because they highlight symptoms and not the roots of this social disease.

The primary challenging in reducing and preventing cyberbullying is the fact that bullying is not considered to be rooted in discrimination.

Moreover, while bullying is an age-old problem (Campbell, 2005; McCarthy et al., 2001) generational differences and fast-paced evolution of technology has left teachers and educational staff ill-equipped to completely understand how to navigate relevant social media or gauge the extent of cyberbullying taking place within their school (Beale & Hall, 2007; Lane, 2011). Mandatory reports to the Quebec government under Bill-56 are simply seen as a chore. Therefore, it is important for teachers and staff to have guiding models to help them understand the scope and seriousness of cyberbullying, and to properly educate students throughout every aspect of the curriculum, ensuring students apprehend the legal risks and consequences engagement in cyberbullying (Beale & Hall, 2007; Hirschstein et al., 2007; Payne et al., 2006). Unfortunately, schools can lack a clearly developed model of what to do in the case of cyberbullying, which has led to lawsuits from both victims (due to inadequate investigation procedures and punishment) and their perpetrators (claiming that since the harassment did not occur during school time or on school property, the school lacked authority to address their conduct, Lane, 2011). Budget restrictions and short staff can increase difficulty for teachers who are attempting to follow through on anti-bullying policies effectively (Mackay & Flood, 2001). It can be easier to place the blame on the youth and the technological tools they utilize, making it easier for schools to become defensive when online incidents occur to their students — implying that these cases are out of their hands and not their responsibility (Churchill, 2007; Shariff, 2003, 2009, Shariff & Wiseman 2016). Moreover, many teachers are insensitive to the needs of marginalized children, an aspect that is often connected to higher rates of online bullying, which may be due to the lower rates of diversity within school staff (Jiwani, 2001; Larson, 1997; Razack, 1998).

IV. Positive Impacts of Social Media and Online Activism

A. Youth activism

Youth are often viewed within research and popular discourse as shallow, apathetic, or at risk, with news headlines and stories often framed to promote kids as being out of control with technology to blame (Edwards, 2005). Recently, our general understanding of young people has begun to shift as a rising number of social media activism and advocacy efforts led by youth are making their way to the public eye. Using participatory online sites such as Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr, youth are using digital media in a multitude of ways to connect with each other, promote social change, and speak out about the world from their perspective. This has allowed narratives to expand away from only focusing on adult concerns and beliefs, as adolescents provide their own opinions on issues such as gentrification and mass incarceration (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017). Over the past years, social media has been used in a wide variety of social movements, due to its high connectedness between users, the faster and more accessible diffusion of information, and lower individual costs of participating (Brünker et al., 2020; Delli Carpini, 2000; Thackeray & Hunter, 2010).

The principle feature that has helped social activism to flourish among youth is user-generated content (Brünker et al., 2020; Ince et al., 2017). Social media is a decentralized method for creating and disseminating ideas, encouraging and aiding its users in moving towards a more active, self-organized approach to social movement (Brünker et al., 2020; Ince et al., 2017). With its evolution of a more collective and self-governed nature, online activism lends itself to be

more easily accessible by youth as they no longer require traditional gatekeepers (such as teachers or community organizers) to build and share knowledge, find like-minded others, and plan and coordinate their actions. An information hub built for the exchange of information and peer interaction, social media can help young activists build relationships across the globe to help gain insight into others' perspectives, engage in world-wide protests, and share educational tools (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017; Thackeray & Hunter, 2010).

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An example of online activism can be found in the hashtag movement #SayHerName, a combination of social media activism, political education, and protests created to bring attention to violence against Black women (Brown et al., 2017). Following the death of Sandra Bland, who died in police custody in Waller County, Texas, the #SayHerName movement focused on bringing to light how police violence and the school-to-prison pipeline impacts more than just straight cis Black men. With an agenda focusing on intersectional mobilization, this online movement was able to create a space for multiple subgroups within Black identity, including women, LGBTQ2+, disabled, and trans groups, many of which go underrepresented in mainstream media (Brown et al., 2017).

Another example was created in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin in the U.S. The perpetrator, George Zimmerman, was acquitted of the murder in July 2013 — a defining moment during an already tense situation, considering the months of protests and demonstrations that had been occurring since Martin's 2012 death and media criminalization. Once the verdict was released, the words "Black Lives Matter" first appeared on Facebook. Since then, the term BLM has had an ever-present presence in social media culture and national discourse, rising in popularity after several police killings of unarmed African Americans, including Michael Brown, Eric Garner, John Crawford, and Ezell Ford (Ince et al., 2017). More

and more Americans on social media outlets shared the hashtag as a cry for racial justice, creating social unrest and protests both on and offline (Ince et al., 2017).

B. Environmental activism

Very recently, during March 2019, approximately 1.4 protesters joined a youth strike for climate change. Founded by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, this protest was led by younger generations in opposition to the current actions of older generations towards the environment. Spanning over the course of one year, these strikes occurred over a series of Fridays, shared online under the hashtag #FridaysforFuture (Boulianne et al., 2020). Under this hashtag, youth were able to educate others, raise awareness, and create dialogue about the movement through media, such as photos of the events and links to traditional news sources. Social media was able to present an opportunity to young activists who wanted to voice their concerns about climate change, as well as document and share this offline discontent by posting photos of events online. Being able to showcase global protests helped encourage action on climate change, demonstrating it as global concern (Boulianne et al., 2020).

These activist and leadership opportunities are central to our educational policy model, whereby students spearhead, embody, and are empowered to take agency in understanding and addressing the challenges without adult intervention, but rather with informed and supportive mentorship.

These activist and leadership opportunities are central to our educational policy model, whereby students spearhead, embody, and are empowered to take agency in understanding and addressing the challenges without adult intervention, but rather with informed and supportive mentorship. Prior to introducing our policy and educational model, it is important to briefly address the unique social, economic, and political contexts that families, children and marginalized groups are experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

V. Experiences, Insights and Dystopia During COVID-19

A. Impact of lockdown

As the sudden halt to the global economy and social isolation brought economic hardship, isolation, death, and social distancing dilemmas, some welcomed the hiatus from living in a hectic and toxic world, noting that the environment and nature needed a break from pollution and traffic, and families had opportunities to bond. Children have had opportunities to bond with parents and families in unprecedented ways over the past six months, with invaluable benefits. However, for some children lockdowns and family time may have placed them in precarious situations, and as such, returning to school may provide them with emotional and physical supports they might desperately need. Consider some of the statistics on children's safety and domestic violence that have emerged over the last six months:

B. Domestic violence and child abuse

In only six months, COVID-19 has upended the lives of children across the globe. School closures have prevented millions of children from accessing their main source of shelter and food, disrupting their routines and support systems (UNICEF, 2020; United Nations, 2020). Regrettably, the global intermission and lockdown at a time of extreme stress, job loss, and economic hardship, has resulted in an increase in domestic violence and child abuse in families globally. Violence against women tends to increase during emergencies, such as pandemics, as security, health, and money worries heighten tension and stress (UN Women, 2020; WHO,

2020). In France, for example, cases of domestic violence increased by 30% since the lockdown in March. In Cyprus and Singapore, helplines have seen an increase in calls by 30% and 33% respectively. In Argentina, emergency calls for domestic violence increased by 25% (UN Women, 2020). Reports also show an increase in human trafficking, as COVID-19 restricts movement, diverts law enforcement, and reduces social services. Victims are now unable to return home as countries close their borders, and in some cases, children have been forced onto the streets in search of food and money, ultimately raising their risk of exploitation (United Nations, 2020. For women who have access to technology, online violence against women has also proliferated (including unwanted, offensive, and sexually explicit emails or SMS messages; or inappropriate advances on social networking sites). The use of online platforms has expanded in the last few weeks as millions of women and girls are using video conferences frequently to work and study. This has provided sexual predators with opportunities to groom women and teens into abusive situations through stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, and sex trolling (UN Women, 2020).

VI. Where Do We Go From Here?

We have attempted to provide a comprehensive and realistic picture of the risks that come with online engagement for young people, that are exacerbated during the pandemic and political dystopia of this geo-political era. As explained at the outset, we have focused our overview largely on cyberbullying and sexualized online violence — forms of online violence rooted in societal and systemic forms of discrimination. Responses over the last two decades have been partly successful but most often result in superficial measures because minimal attention is paid to intersecting roots of cyberviolence. The Internet and social media are simply vehicles that allow the hate to spread if not controlled. It is not within the scope of this article to address the roles and responsibilities of social media intermediaries — that is an issue for a separate paper. However, we do believe that given the prevalence and devastating impact of offensive communication through these media channels, it is incumbent on social media intermediaries to responsibly take down harmful content. While in the past they have been able to ignore such posts because they were legally considered to be distributors and not publishers (*Zeran v. America Online, Inc.*), public safety and demands for action have resulted in intermediaries like Twitter to post warnings about the veracity of certain posts, even when they come from high profile political leaders. While Facebook is the slowest to respond to these changes, the tide is turning slowly. Hence, research on specific legalities and evolving obligations of social media intermediaries would be timely and valuable at this time.

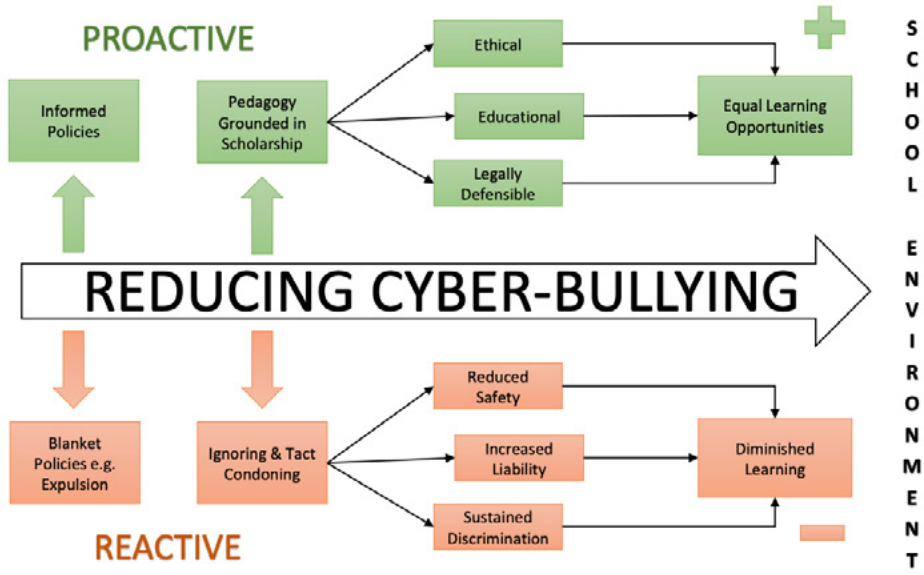
VII. Defining the Lines with iMPACTS: A Multi-Sectored Parternship Policy Model to Rehumanize Children's Online Communication ("iMPACTS Policy Model")

A. Concept maps defining lines on cyberbullying

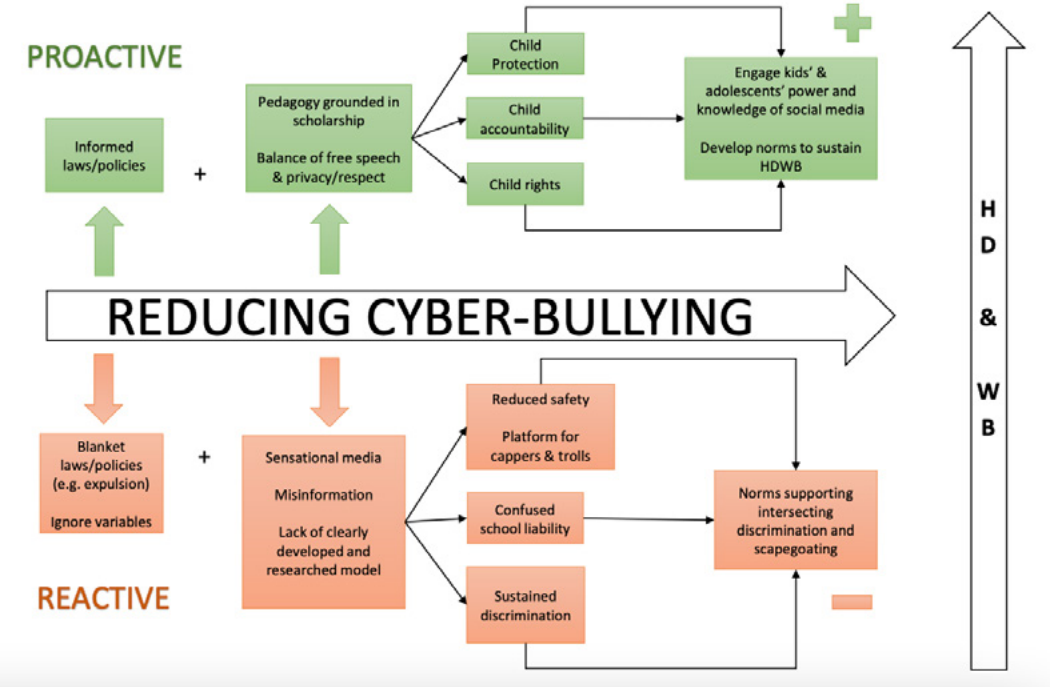
In 2009, Shariff developed two Concept Maps that "define the lines" or illustrate major differences in ways that proactive or reactive policies and educational practices sustain school environments to a) either systemically support cyberbullying (negatively impacting children's human development, health, and wellbeing); or b) enhance children's agency, empowerment, and wellbeing incorporating informed approaches towards positive, inclusive, and supportive school and university environments.

The top tier in both Consept Maps (+ sign) highlight proactive responses to cyberbullying and sustainable policy approaches to reduce it. The maps are designed to remind stakeholders of the importance of providing policymakers with informed scholarship and non-arbitrary approaches to respond to cyberbullying, to help them remove children from toxic forms of online communication that impact mental health and ultimately, the physical school environment. The top tier guides educators to ensure that students have opportunities for agency, empowerment, mentorship, reflection, critical engagement, and activism to enhance human development, health and wellbeing, and social relationships. The bottom tier (- sign) on both Concept Maps highlight systemic approaches and barriers that tacitly

condone and perpetuate negative conditions supportive of bullying, cyberbullying, sexual violence; systemic racism and homophobic violence.



Concept Map 1: Defining the Lines on Cyberbullying – School Environment
Shaheen Shariff, Ph.D., James McGill Professor (from Confronting Cyberbullying, Cambridge University Press 2009).



Concept Map 2: Defining the Lines on Cyberbullying –Human Development and Wellbeing (HD&WB); Shaheen Shariff, Ph.D., James McGill Professor

B. Making iMPACTS

Building on these Concept Maps in 2016, Shariff, as Principal Investigator and Project Director, developed a multi-disciplinary, multi-sector approach to addressing cyberbullying and online sexual violence that we apply everyday as part of our research and knowledge mobilization under a seven-year multi-sector partnership grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) to address sexual violence and online sexualized cyberbullying.

The current project is entitled "iMPACTS" (see www.mcgill.ca/definetheline/iMPACTS), and brings together 28 university partners; 25 community advocacy and corporate partners; 15 collaborators; 30 academic co-investigators, and over 50 graduate and undergraduate research assistants. Institutional partners include faculties of law, medicine, dentistry, social work, arts, management, communications studies, gender studies, and education, *inter alia*. Community partners include advocacy groups for women and children including YWCA and Canadian Women's Foundation; social media intermediaries like Facebook Canada; and art gallery associations and theatre companies.

For deep, sustainable change to be effective, it requires the engagement of government and the justice community, institutional and community partners with children and youth — who must be provided agency and mentorship to think through and address the issues critically, informed by partner expertise and mentorship.

The premise of our public policy and educational model is that no single stakeholder can address this overwhelming crisis of bullying on their own. For deep, sustainable change to be effective, it requires the engagement of government and the justice community, institutional and community partners with children and youth — who *must* be provided agency and mentorship to think through and address the issues critically, informed by partner expertise and mentorship. After five successful years of collaborative partnerships under iMPACTS since 2016, our project has made headway in reclaiming the role of universities to educate not only their own students and communities about sexual violence and sexualized cyberbullying, but also to inform and engage greater society through creative and

critical engagement in dialogue about the issues with institutional and community partners, and the public.

The overarching aim of iMPACTS is to reclaim the role of universities in unearthing and addressing a deeply embedded intersecting culture of misogyny, sexism, homophobia, racism, and disregard for people with disabilities. When educational institutions react to incidents of cyberbullying or sexual violence without directing attention to systemic and intersectional forms of discrimination, it is unlikely they will be successful in preventing these phenomena. The path to sustained reduction and prevention of on-and-off-line sexual violence and cyberbullying requires engagement of young people with academics and experts in various disciplines such as education, law, medicine, dentistry, engineering, arts, science; and also with multi-sector community partners and corporations; social media intermediaries; and advocacy groups that lobby governments for policies and resources to support them.

C. A three-pronged multi-disciplinary, multi-sector approach

Our project focuses on three specific areas:

- *Project A - Law and Policy*: The objective of Project A is to research and dismantle systemic barriers that public institutions including the legal justice system might create for survivors of sexual violence and online sexual bullying. We undertake reviews of emerging legislation and case law to keep up with rapid evolution and advances in online technologies. To that end, we have partnered with law faculties; developed workshops for judges and bar associations; contributed expert policy briefs to legislators. Shariff has appeared as expert witness for the Canadian Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights; and several House of Commons committees. She has also advised on provincial cyberbullying legislative committees.

- *Project B - Arts and Popular Culture*: We want to learn how young people (who are the largest consumers of online popular culture) are impacted by arts and popular culture. We examine: a) ways in which arts and popular culture might tacitly condone cyberbullying and sexual cyber violence (e.g., sexist and misogynist comedy; movies with a racial bias); and b) alternately, how arts and popular culture can be mobilized through social media to help address and

reduce these forms of violence. In this regard, we partner with art galleries; theatre companies; art therapists; musicians and arts institutions to provide creative opportunities for dialogue and reflection;

- *Project C - News and Social Media*: Under Project C, we critically analyze news reports and social media posts to examine: a) the extent to which they might tacitly condone and perpetuate sexual and cyberviolence; influenced public policy through biased reporting that mobilize "courts of public opinion" in highly reported cases; deliberately framed news stories to misinform or provide "fake news" to the public, and b) alternately, we examine the extent to which news media be reframed to help educate the public and inform policies in ways that unearth and understand cyberbullying roots, with the intention of reducing it in sustained ways. Each project has one or several academic Project Leads within the partnership.

D. Shared knowledge with sector partners – "A ripple effect"

Our international partnerships and collaborations are essential. Universities and schools should not assume that because they have an antibullying or sexual violence policy established, they have absolved their obligations. The responsibility of educational institutions is to ensure they have in place informed policies and relevant processes that are centralized and known to all frontline staff who receive reports and disclosures. It is important to equip students in every discipline to understand the deep roots of sexual violence and cyberbullying; learn the legal, health, and career risks, and engage in dialogues with multi-sector partners who can share expertise and experiences from the workplace.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, dialogues with artists, theatre groups, and musicians under iMPACTS brought together students and members of the public in safe spaces to enable informed, evidence-based dialogues and debates. The objective of our model is to cause a "ripple effect." Academics and students share their knowledge with sector partners who in turn bring their sector expertise to the universities. Knowledge expanded from shared discussions and dialogue is then carried back to partner sector workplaces, and ultimately into broader society. This comprehensive approach may not reap immediate results. It is expected to take several years, but result in lasting impacts. Ultimately, if the

model is implemented effectively, the spread of knowledge through every aspect of the curriculum, school life and workplace show greater promise than band-aid policies that remain as window dressing. Moreover, research on cyberbullying has established that when students are told "not to" engage in cyberbullying, even by expert speakers, this has minimal impact (Shariff, 2017, 2009). Deep understanding about endemic forms of discrimination in our society, of intersecting systemic barriers that perpetuate sexism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, can only be recognized by students if they are immersed in research and critical analysis of the issues.

E. Agency, empowerment and student mentorship with partners

This requires fostering a supportive system of agency, empowerment, and mentorship among students. iMPACTS has achieved this goal through a governance structure that includes a Student Mentorship Committee (SMC), whereby academic Project Leads for Projects A, B, and C mentor Doctoral students, who mentor Masters students; who in turn mentor Undergraduate students (including pre-service teachers, law students, and those in professional health programs). Those students in turn pass on their knowledge when they enter professional practice.

This engagement is strengthened through internships and research assistance with sector partners such as Facebook, the Canadian Women's Foundation, West Coast LEAF (a women's legal intervention organization); YWCA (a non-profit organization that engages in numerous youth programs across the country and is collaborating to develop cross-country workshops and toolkits for youth); and the Emily Carr University of Art and Design (a post-secondary art school that is developing documentary videos from working with theatre students at Langara College in British Columbia). Art galleries such as the McClure Gallery in Montreal hosted a joint exhibit with expert panel dialogues to showcase and discuss the art of five feminist artists (three Indigenous, one South Asian, one Mexican and one guest trans-gendered Mauritian artist). Simon Fraser University, Emily Carr University and Douglas College theatre group worked with theatre companies Studio 58 and New World to develop *Incognito Mode*, a play that highlights the easy access that children and youth have to online pornography, and that sexual violence in viewed pornography is increasingly normalized among youth. They call for improved sexuality education that addresses online sexualized cyberbullying of youth like

Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons. Montreal theatre partner Teesri Duniya has also developed several plays on systemic racism and intersectional sexism.

F. Institutional climate surveys on sexual violence and sexualized cyberbullying

Students from multi-disciplinary faculties were centrally engaged in developing qualitative survey questions and focus groups for empirical climate studies on sexual violence and cyberbullying. These surveys have regrettably been postponed during the pandemic but will most likely be distributed to 28 partner universities in Fall 2021. All data collected will be preserved in a Data Repository which is also under development. Our collective research will continue to inform policy development at governmental and institutional levels.

A representation of two scenarios

As explained above, with Projects A to C, we are examining the negative and positive aspects of law and policy, art and popular culture, news and social media.

In our first scenario, we highlight the dystopian, officially sanctioned divisive model of cyberbullying we discussed earlier in this paper that resides in a wider socio-political and systemic context, and which perpetuates reactive institutions where students are told not to bully, instead of equipping them to understand why they should not hurt others on-or-offline. In this scenario, the institutional environment remains toxic. It is easily influenced by the broader context of online access to art and popular culture that tacitly condones offensive, racist, and sexist jokes, videos that demean women; religious or vulnerable groups; and people with disabilities, and music that contains obscene or offensive lyrics putting down women, girls, and LGBTQ2+ or Indigenous communities. When student engagement in dialogue is absent, they cannot learn about or reflect on seemingly biased court decisions. They cannot write op-eds or articles that draw government, public, and judicial attention to systemic sexism, racism or bias. Without the #MeToo dialogues via social and news media, “entitled” predatorial celebrity men would not have lost their successful careers and might still be victimizing women and girls. Police would not have been called out for victim blaming, and neither would official sanctioning of hate by political leaders. This, in reflection to Projects A to C, this scenario: Offers a reactive institutional policy, aids in official sanctioning of cyberbullied victim blaming, and does not help students’ in

reflecting on uninformed court decisions (Project A – Law and Policy); Is influence by and perpetuates demeaning, mean, and offensive film, videos, images, and lyrics (Project B – Arts and Popular Culture); Encourages hate and trolling online posts, and does not aid in critical reflection into sensational headlines and biased reporting (Project C – News and Social Media).

In our second scenario, we incorporate the iMPACTS multi-disciplinary, multi-sector educational policy approach, highlighting the filter down and ripple effect of rehumanizing — impactful change not only within the school or university environment, but also throughout public sectors that influence and inform society at large. Students are offered agency and empowerment as they are included in the discussion concerning on-and-offline bullying, which is done through a dialogue of respect concerning education, law, and arts based on online environments. Similarly to our previous dystopian model, we can utilize Projects A to C as we understand that this positive scenario: Offers an informed institutional policy, aids in removing sanctioned hate in biased courts, and allows for a respectful and compassionate judiciary (Project A – Law and Policy); Enhances arts and pop culture that promotes diversity and debates towards countering hate (Project B – Arts and Popular Culture); Helps students learn how to critically read news and become fact checking experts, write op-eds and articles in order to draw attention towards systemic discrimination, as well as create a social media that is more informed, respectful, inclusive, and supportive (Project C – Media).

Conclusion and Implications

Our paper highlights a range of challenges in today's dystopian world that significantly and negatively impact the quality of children's engagement with technology. This is a concern given that a substantial part of their day is spent online — a phenomenon that has significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, it is incumbent on educators and policymakers to seriously consider innovative ways of addressing the toxic online environment and helping to raise children and youth above it. This is best achieved by providing agency and empowering students with multi-disciplinary, creative tools and opportunities for safe and creative dialogues through art, drama, and music. Art galleries and theatre productions provide safe spaces for analysis of art works and debate about their social, political, philosophical ideas.

These opportunities can also be provided through science subjects such as mathematics or health-related courses, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, where children could be encouraged to consider statistical numbers of people who fell ill and were tested during the pandemic; how many people died; the impact of the pandemic on disadvantaged groups; the impacts of systemic racism on health, jobs, and the justice system.

Youth can explore and research videos relating to the impact of cyberbullying and online jokes, distribution of unflattering GIFs, and demeaning intimate images that repeat and resurface to revictimize targets of cyberbullying and sexual violence. Students can consider privacy issues that are breached when cyberbullying occurs; and think of ways that cyber-sexual trafficking and child pornography

might be contained and stopped; and how to reduce children's access to online pornography, particularly because violent pornography is normalized for youth through easy access. It is important to have young people, especially teenagers, think through leadership opportunities to alleviate the significant pain caused by cyberbullying and online sexual harassment. Children and youth can engage in developing policy models to address these challenges so that they are equipped to take on leadership in these matters in the future.

Our policy model does not provide a quick fix. Rather, it provides long-term sustainable options. We cannot "fix" kids through band-aid solutions when they engage in cyberbullying, which many researchers, educators, and parents have tried to do without due attention to broader and deeper systemic causes. We can study children's online behaviors for years; but if we do not address roots of the socio-political disease that brings out these symptoms, we are wasting time. In this paper, we have insisted that the challenges are deeply rooted in discrimination, and observed that the roots of cyberbullying have surfaced unashamedly and have been officially sanctioned through the highest international political platforms and leadership podiums. When our children see and hear what these leaders have to say, they need to be equipped to analyze and discuss politicians' offensive comments critically.

It is important that children and youth arrive at their own decisions as to which online models of communication they prefer to follow. Despite the proliferation of negative online models of behavior, we have confidence in young people. Many youths have demonstrated concern and a social conscience with respect to preserving the environment, with Greta Thunberg as an excellent role model. Young people have come out in large numbers during the pandemic in cities across the globe to vocalize their frustration with systemic racism and police brutality through peaceful protests. With thoughtful and informed policy approaches, we are confident that children and teens, tomorrow's leaders, will move beyond the divisive fear and rhetoric cyberbullying and officially sanctioned hate. They will work to re-energize our imploding democracies with viable alternatives for an inclusive and equitable future online society.

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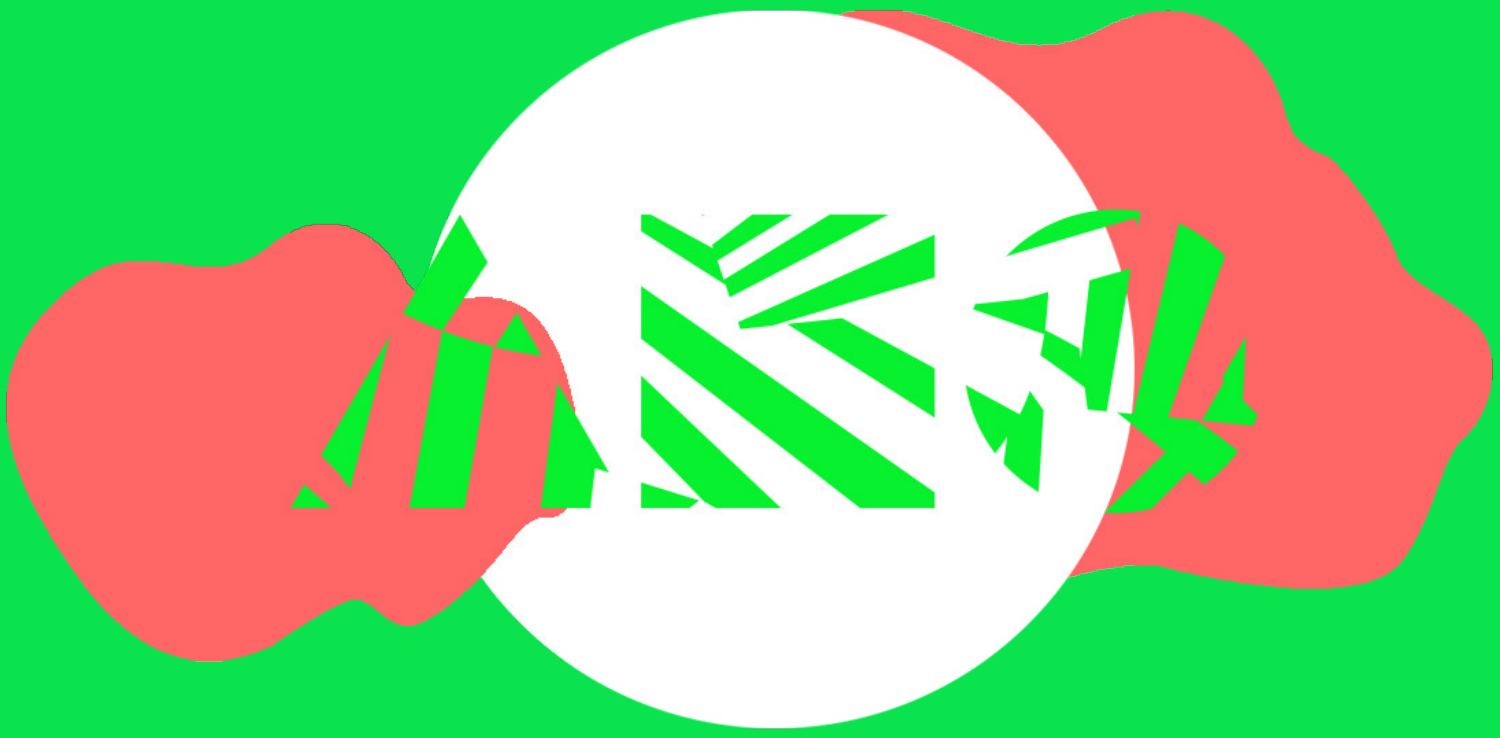

Designed by Yasmeen Safaie

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