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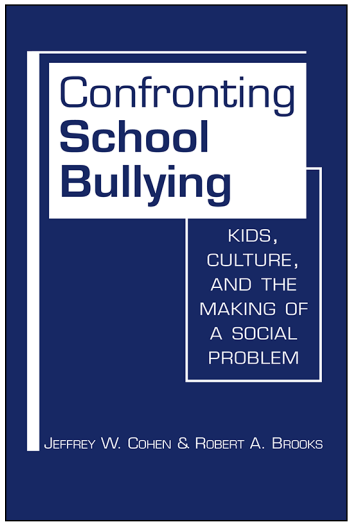
Confronting School Bullying: Kids, Culture, and the Making of a Social Problem

Jeffrey W. Cohen
and Robert A. Brooks



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Bullying and the Shifting Construction of a Social Problem

According to media reports, on Thursday, January 10, 2013, a 16-year-old boy entered his California high school, shot one classmate, and attempted to shoot another before teacher Ryan Heber and school counselor Kim Fields stepped in and defused the situation. Within hours the news media were searching for information and answers. On CNN's *Anderson Cooper 360* (January 10, 2013), correspondent Kyung Lah reported: "According to numerous parents and friends and students we talked to here, this boy had a hit list of . . . people who he wanted to kill." When Cooper asked about the boy's motivation, Lah responded: "What we have learned, Anderson, is that he's a troubled boy. . . . They believe he was bullied because he was so odd." Other CNN programs and other news media broadcasts (for example, *CBS Morning News,* January 11, 2013) also made the connection between the bullying and the shooting. By 2013, the link between retaliatory violence and bullying had become so ingrained that the news media also made it a point to highlight instances in which bullying was not seen as a direct factor. For instance, in a story about a Colorado teen who shot and wounded a teacher and then killed himself, the *Boston Globe* (December 15, 2013) reported that the boy held politically unconventional views but had not been bullied for his beliefs.

In addition to the link between bullying and retaliatory violence, news media accounts also drew connections between bullying and youth suicide. On Thursday, April 4, 2013, just a few months after the previously mentioned California school shooting, 17-year-old Rehtaeh Parson from Nova Scotia, Canada, died by suicide after a photo of what the news media called her 2011 "gang rape" was posted online. Some

media commentators claimed Parsons had been "bullied to death" (e.g., Erin Burnett, on her CNN program *Outfront,* April 10, 2013). Just two days after coverage of Parson's suicide had begun, CNN and other news media outlets linked her death to the September 2012 suicide in California of 15-year-old Audrie Pott. Members of the news media reported that Pott had also been bullied after photos of her own gang rape were posted online, and that three teenage boys were charged with the assault. CNN's Don Lemon claimed these two suicides were part of a "disturbing trend among teenagers" that involved house parties and alcohol: "Boys allegedly rape the girl, . . . pictures of rape [are] posted online, the girl [is] blamed, and then bullied and commits suicide" (*Newsroom,* April 12, 2013).

These incidents are only a few of the thousands of stories about bullying we found in news media transcripts; they illustrate that the linking of school bullying to retaliatory violence (e.g., school shootings) and to suicide had by 2013 become a dominant discourse in mainstream news media. Emphasizing such extreme outcomes—and linking them together to suggest first a trend and then an epidemic—is an important factor contributing to how school bullying has come to be perceived as a serious social problem. This contrasts with the early 1990s, when the threat of bullying was usually constructed in rather mild terms. While few dismissed bullying entirely with a "kids will be kids" attitude, descriptions like the following 1993 excerpt from a *New York Times* (*NYT*) "Parent and Child" column were not uncommon: "A 10-year-old who is extorting milk money or threatening to chase a child home after school can loom large in the fears of an 8-year-old. Handing over a quarter a day to avoid possibly being beaten up seems a small price to pay" (October 28, 1993). By 2010, bullying had been elevated to a threat of catastrophic proportions; John Quiñones opened a segment of NBC's *Prime Time Live* by asking: "Harmless bullying? A simple part of growing up? Or a tragic epidemic that leaves entire schools heartbroken, parents childless and families torn apart?" (October 29, 2010).

Besides an elevation of the magnitude of harm, the bullying threat came to be expanded in four other ways. Bullying was defined *down* to include nonproblems like consensual teasing and was defined *up* to include serious criminal offenses within its ambit. Bullying also was defined *out* by taking in more and more students as potential bullies and victims, and by the end of our study period it was regularly being defined *across* many unrelated areas of social life, from the trivial to the tragic. How this expansion occurred, and its impact in shaping explanations for and responses to school bullying, is an important theme of this

book. Also of central importance is how the focus on bullying's causes and social control responses shifted between micro and macro levels, at various times emphasizing individuals, families, school institutions, or the larger culture. All of this occurred in a news media environment that favors simplifying complex social problems such as school bullying while also actively engaging in the construction of those problems.

News Media and the Construction of Social Problems

The news does not simply act as a mirror of the culture, even if one could indeed ascertain what "the" culture actually is. Moreover, public understanding of events and issues is highly dependent upon news media representations. Thus the production of news represents a distortion of reality grounded in political, socioeconomic, ideological, and journalistic interests. News, from one point of view, is not a reflection of what's "out there" but only of characteristics of news production (Fishman, 1997, p. 211; Molotch and Lester, 1974, p. 110). For others, the production of news represents a process through which reality is constructed, separate from those kinds of interests. From this perspective, reality exists independent of news media constructions and thus there is some objective aspect to news, unrelated to news production. We see news media as both producing news *and* reflecting cultural phenomena; they act under influences that are both cultural (including political, economic, and ideological forces) and also unique to news production. In addition, we take the view that news media do not simply transmit messages; rather, readers of media decode those messages and construct their own meaning. Some of those meanings may be contrary or resistive to the intended message (see White, 2012, for a summary of media reception theory). Two brief case studies may help illustrate what we mean by these points.

Case Studies in News Media Constructions of School Bullying as a Social Problem

One way media produce news is by constructing particular events as *signal crimes:* "events that, in addition to affecting the immediate participants . . . impact in some way upon a wider audience . . . caus[ing] them to reconfigure their behaviors or beliefs in some way" (Innes, 2003, p. 52). Coverage of the 2010 suicides of Phoebe Prince and Tyler Clementi starkly illustrates how news media claimsmakers actively con-

struct signal crimes. Prince was a 15-year-old living in South Hadley, Massachusetts, who died by suicide in January 2010 in response to what media reports described as months of bullying by so-called mean girls over her dating relationships with two boys at her high school. Clementi was an 18-year-old incoming student at Rutgers University who leapt to his death from the George Washington Bridge on September 22, 2010, shortly after his dorm mate, Dharun Ravi, had streamed images of Clementi engaging in sexual behavior with another man and tweeted about it.

As news media coverage of both suicides intensified, each was framed as the impetus for a national conversation about bullying. Two weeks after Prince's suicide, ABC's Yunji de Nies reported: "Advocates say the country needs to wake up to this 21st century problem" (January 28, 2010). News media responded in force. For example, NBC described her case as "the ultimate example of school bullying" (*NBC Nightly News,* September 5, 2010). Similarly, more than a year after Clementi's suicide, news media claimsmakers noted that it "sparked a chain reaction generating a media and cultural firestorm" (ABC's *20/20,* March 23, 2012) and "became an international symbol of the consequences of bullying and homophobia" (*CBS Evening News,* February 19, 2012). Both suicides were also implicated in the adoption of anti-bullying legislation at the state level. More than a year after Prince's suicide, CNN legal contributor Sunny Hostin claimed: "Anti-bullying laws have been passed in Massachusetts because of Phoebe Prince. We are all talking about this because of Phoebe Prince. This has set a precedent. Again, bullying will never be seen the same way again" (*Newsroom,* May 5, 2011). The *New York Times* reported that Clementi's suicide "prompted New Jersey lawmakers to adopt one of the nation's toughest civil antibullying laws" (February 25, 2012).

Like other aspects of news, the construction of signal crimes is influenced by factors specific to news production. For instance, contemporary news media operate in a highly competitive, around-the-clock news cycle and thus pay greater attention to events that have news values such as emotion, conflict, and visual impact (McGregor, 2002). The significance of news values has increased with the proliferation of "infotainment" and talk shows, the rise of the blogosphere, the political polarization of media, hyper-competitiveness, and greater delivery of news in video form, on television, and on the Internet. Because events with the highest news values are by definition unique, news media coverage tends to produce a "law of opposites" whereby the most unusual incidents and least-likely victims receive the most attention (Surette,

2007). Within this lopsided coverage—and related to it—arises a hierarchy of victimization with disproportionate focus determined by victims' demographic characteristics (including class or "respectability," gender, age, race, ethnicity, and sexuality).

At the top of this hierarchy are *ideal victims,* a group that "includes those who are perceived as vulnerable, defenseless, innocent and worthy of sympathy and compassion," such as young children (Greer, 2007, p. 22). Those who are perceived as not possessing these characteristics may see their stories receive little, if any, coverage. For example, some studies have shown that crimes involving nonwhite victims receive less media attention than those involving white victims (Pritchard and Hughes, 1997; Weiss and Chermak, 1998). Both Phoebe Prince and Tyler Clementi—young, white, and seemingly naive—were actively constructed as ideal victims in news media coverage of their suicides.

Prince and Clementi as ideal victims. Initial descriptions of Prince focused on three main characteristics—her status as a recent immigrant, her physical appearance, and her age: "By all accounts a lively girl, newly arrived at school last fall with an Irish brogue, Ms. Prince soon caught the eye of Sean Mulveyhill, a senior and a football star, and they briefly dated" (*NYT,* April 2, 2010); "15-year-old Phoebe Prince was an attractive high school freshman who'd moved to Massachusetts from Ireland last year" (*CBS Evening News,* March 29, 2010). By focusing on Prince's status as an immigrant and newcomer to her school, her physical appearance, and her youth, the news media crafted an image of Prince as especially vulnerable. Constructions of Tyler Clementi as an ideal victim highlighted similar aspects. Clementi was new to his school, newly "out," and the "shy aspiring violinist from Ridgewood" (*NYT,* May 24, 2011). ABC's Chris Cuomo described Clementi as "shy, reserved, a self-described loner" and a "skilled violinist" (*20/20,* March 23, 2012).

Once constructions of a victim as ideal take hold, news media claimsmakers tend to maintain them even when faced with more complex narratives. For instance, over time, information related to Prince's behavioral and psychological history emerged. The eponymous host of CNN's *The Joy Behar Show* told viewers that Prince had "written essays about self-mutilation before she committed suicide," noting: "It seems as though she was tormented for quite a time before" (April 21, 2010). News media claimsmakers also began to explore Prince's childhood in Ireland. Freelance journalist Donal Lynch appeared in a report by NBC's Jeff Rossen on *Today* discussing his interviews with what he

referred to as "many of Phoebe's friends in Ireland," noting: "They told me that [she] had grown up basically as a very happy girl, but in recent years she had kind of undergone a bit of upheaval." Rossen added: "Her parents had separated and her mom had decided to take her to South Hadley. She missed her father very much. She was, you know, not that happy at that point. She had her own baggage at that time" (April 21, 2010). *Slate* magazine's Emily Bazelon noted: "For me, the most surprising thing involved her mental health history because that really hadn't been disclosed" (NBC's *Today,* July 21, 2010).

Additional facts about Tyler Clementi also had the potential to complicate the narrative of the ideal victim. The *New York Times* (August 13, 2011) reported that this new information, including Internet chat transcriptions, created "a more complex picture" of Clementi. According to this newspaper, the Internet chats "appeared to cloud the image of Mr. Clementi as a shy, violin-playing innocent." (Because no new information was cited that would "cloud" Clementi's musicianship, we have to assume that, for the media, playing the violin marked Clementi as a particularly sensitive person.) The *New York Times* claimed that the transcripts "do not portray a man fearful of having his sexual orientation disclosed" and that Clementi "played down [his roommate's] telling people" about his sexual encounter. The transcripts also included Clementi making "some raunchy sexual comments" on an Internet site and evaluating his roommate as being "sooo indian/first gen americanish" that his parents were sure to own a Dunkin' Donuts. ABC's Chris Cuomo reported: "The reticent violinist had been in turmoil. . . . Lost in the media crush, Tyler had been writing about his own depression, his loneliness and the rejection he felt after coming out to his parents" (*20/20,* March 23, 2012). In both cases, however, these layers of complexity did not significantly alter preexisting news media constructions. In fact, reports such as these were relatively rare and short-lived.

The evil predator. In juxtaposition to the narrative of the ideal victim, news media constructions of signal crimes employ the image of the evil predator, whose behavior tends to be described in increasingly menacing tones. This was definitely the case of both Prince's and Clementi's alleged bullies, especially after the announcement of criminal charges. Ten weeks after Prince's suicide, district attorney Elizabeth D. Scheibel held a news conference in which she announced the filing of adult criminal charges against six students at South Hadley High School, where Prince had been a student. Three additional students were charged as juveniles, as reported in the *New York Times* (March 30, 2010) the day

after the press conference. Up until this point, few commentators in the broadcast media and none of the *New York Times* articles had mentioned Prince's suicide, let alone the status of the case as a national example. It wasn't until the filing of charges that the importance of the Prince case took hold. While this was not the first time charges had been filed against an alleged bully, the seriousness of the offenses worked to situate the Prince case as unique. Prince's alleged bullies were charged with offenses including statutory rape, criminal harassment, stalking, and violation of civil rights. Scheibel, during her press conference, noted that the bullying that Prince endured on the day of her suicide was "the culmination of a nearly three-month campaign of verbally abusive and assaultive behavior and threats of physical harm" (CNN's *Campbell Brown,* March 30, 2010). Drawing on the initial description provided by Scheibel, news media and other claimsmakers began to emphasize the seriousness of the bullying as well as its prolonged nature. The bullying was referred to as consisting of "physical threats," "verbal abuse," "harassment," and even "torture." Terms such as "relentless" were used to articulate the fact that the bullying had begun long before Prince's suicide.

Criminal charges also seemed to be the impetus for wider coverage of the Tyler Clementi case and greater focus on the young man who was said to have caused Clementi's suicide. In response to Clementi's suicide, Dharun Ravi, his dorm mate, was charged with and eventually convicted of crimes that carried the potential of a ten-year sentence, although he was ultimately sentenced to only thirty days in jail by a trial judge. The initial charging documents and trial testimony alleged that Ravi had twice streamed video images from his webcam to his computer. However, the media described Ravi's actions in ways that were frequently ambiguous and incomplete. What was streamed, and to whom and where, was often left unanswered. The lack of details likely led the public to assume the worst. As Chris Cuomo reported on ABC's *20/20* (March 2, 2012), media reports may have led the public to incorrectly believe "that Ravi not only watched Tyler having sex with his male lover, but that he secretly recorded the act, posted the video online, and outed his roommate out of spite."

Cultural influences. As mentioned earlier, broader cultural factors, including political, economic, and ideological forces, also influence news production. Our two case studies provide some illustration of this as well. While there were relatively few instances in which the evil predator construction was challenged in the Prince case, there were fre-

quent debates in news media about how to frame the behavior of Dharun Ravi in relation to Clementi, even as he himself was almost universally condemned. A frequent question was whether the behavior was—as the *New York Times* (October 1, 2010) put it—"a thoughtless prank or a crime." This question was increasingly likely to be posed as the trial verdict approached and also after the verdict, and was asked in a variety of ways: "Was this . . . a malicious homophobe . . . or . . . a stupid prankster? (CNN's *Newsroom,* February 21, 2012); "Was it homophobia? Was it adolescent stupidity?" (CNN's *Erin Burnett Outfront,* March 1, 2012). As we detail later, the broader discourse on sexuality within news media and US society served to limit the discursive resources available to those who attempted to construct Clementi as an ideal victim and Ravi as an evil predator. Prince's case, however, fit comfortably within existing constructions of gender within the broader cultural discourse.

Coverage of these two cases was also influenced by the existing discourse of bullying. For instance, not only did the filing of criminal charges situate these two cases as unique (and therefore newsworthy), but they also constituted a simplification of the bullying narrative by articulating a direct link between bullying and suicide. The day after the district attorney's press conference regarding Prince's "bullycide,"[1] CNN's Tony Harris claimed: "Hard to believe. Bullied to death, literally" (*Newsroom,* March 30, 2010). After Clementi took his own life, news media also articulated a direct link between bullying and suicide among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth: "bullying related to sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation [was] *the* cause of some of the recent suicides" (*NYT,* May 29, 2011).[2] Additionally, by situating these two cases as signal crimes within the broader discourse on bullying, news media and other claimsmakers were able to present bullycide as additional evidence of a growing epidemic of (school) bullying. There now existed a national news media platform from which claimsmakers could articulate the need to treat school bullying with increased seriousness and impose mechanisms of social control.

Theoretical and Methodological Orientation

It may already be evident that our analysis of news media discourse regarding school bullying is grounded in a constructionist lens. As such, we view social problems as emerging from and being sustained through

concerted human action, particularly discourse (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Blumer, 1971). Whether a phenomenon such as school bullying is widely acknowledged as a social problem depends more on the outcome of an often highly contentious process of claimsmaking activities than on an assessment of the problem as intrinsically harmful, unhealthy, or unnatural (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977). This process of claimsmaking is most publicly carried out in news media. Therefore, our analysis focuses on national news outlets across multiple formats. From television, we focused on the news divisions of ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox, and NBC. From radio, we selected National Public Radio (NPR). And from the print media, we selected the *New York Times*. We accessed transcripts using the Lexis-Nexis database, which provides textual transcripts for newspaper articles and television and radio shows. We analyzed transcripts from each media source from January 1, 1992, until June 30, 2013. Our analysis was grounded in a critical realist methodological framework. Those interested in a more detailed discussion of our methodology are encouraged to read the Appendix at the back of the book.

Traditionally, constructionist researchers have focused almost exclusively on *how* social problems are constructed, shying away from statements about the broader implications of those constructions. We adopt a more contextual approach that recognizes that it is neither desirable nor possible to ignore the broader contexts in which social problems are constructed. We must, therefore, not only consider *how* a social problem is constructed through discourse, but *what* it is that is being constructed and *why*. In terms of what is being constructed, we must address larger cultural and social contexts that serve to both provide and limit the kinds of discursive resources that are available (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008), as we suggested earlier in relation to Clementi's sexuality. In terms of the why, we must be able to explain the intentional and unintentional implications of the construction of a particular social problem (Bogard, 2003). In line with the view through our contextual constructionist lens, we not only describe the process through which school bullying came to be constructed as a serious social problem, but also put forth the argument that its construction has broad cultural and social implications.

The Construction of School Bullying

Understanding how any cultural phenomenon has been constructed requires that we pay close attention to both popular and academic dis-

course. Each has its own methods of constructing social problems. Contrary to predominant notions of social science, academic scholars and researchers are not simply reporting reality; rather, they are producing realities through their application of particular disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological practices (Law, 2004). Hacking (1999, pp. 33–34) suggests that research creates purported facts that can create looping effects by influencing the behavior that is the subject of study. Interestingly, the mass media work in similar ways, as we explore in Chapter 7. Thus, both news media claimsmakers and researchers work to construct particular realities of bullying. Sometimes these realities work to more deeply entrench one another; at other times these realities compete with one another for legitimacy. That which is held as a valid truth claim regarding school bullying in one context may be expanded, adapted, or ignored in another. Definitions of school bullying are continuously re-negotiated within and across these contexts. As we will see throughout this book, news media constructions of bullying overlap with, but also differ from, constructions of bullying within academic discourse, leading some to suggest that definitions of school bullying held by researchers may differ quite substantially from those held by the general public (Griffin and Gross, 2004). Situating our analysis of news media constructions of school bullying in relation to the academic literature is important because the popular press often references researchers as experts, who thus serve as trusted claimsmakers regarding school bullying, its impact, and potential strategies for intervention. In addition, the findings of researchers are touted as evidence, lending credibility to efforts to curb school bullying, whether or not these findings are grounded in an accurate interpretation of their research.

The convergence of news media and public attention to bullying is in fact implicated in the emergence of school bullying as an area of academic study. Researchers trace the beginnings of academic interest in school bullying to widespread media and public attention in Norway in response to two bullying-related suicides—regarded as the impetus for Dan Olweus's work in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Beaty and Alexeyev, 2008; Griffin and Gross, 2004; Hoover and Stenhjem, 2003; Kochenderfer-Ladd and Troop-Gordon, 2010; Schoen and Schoen, 2010; Smith, 2004; Stassen Berger, 2007). However, it took a few more decades for bullying to become a sustained focus of research in the United States. In an analysis of citations from peer-reviewed journals in several online databases, Stassen Berger (2007) noted that attention to bullying in academic literature in the United States seemed

to increase dramatically during the beginning of the twenty-first century. In particular, the study by Nansel and colleagues (2001) of the prevalence of bullying in the United States seems to mark the beginnings of more focused attention to bullying in US contexts (Spivak, 2003), and continues to serve as a rallying point for those who frame bullying as an epidemic worthy of serious concern. Moreover, attention to bullying in the United States is also intimately tied to the link between bullying and retaliatory violence, as articulated in both academic and popular discourse in the 1990s, such as in claims in the wake of the Columbine school shootings. As illustrated in later chapters, attention to bullying in the United States is also linked to bullycides. While our analysis focuses on news media and academic constructions of bullying within the United States, it is important to note that the literature on school bullying had a long history in European countries and elsewhere (most significantly in Japan) prior to garnering attention in the United States.

Over time, researchers have worked to construct a more stable definition of bullying; however, there are competing claims regarding the extent to which they have succeeded. Definitions of bullying are often relatively vague and imprecise, and vary across methodology and study context (Carrera, DePalma, and Lameiras, 2011; Griffin and Gross, 2004; Horton, 2006; Stassen Berger, 2007). Carrera, DePalma, and Lameiras suggest that "it is not simply that we lack a universally accepted definition of what many refer to as 'bullying,' but that the terminology itself, as deployed across different national contexts and languages, is varied and imprecise" (2011, p. 481). Even while acknowledging the difficulty of constructing a universal definition of bullying, academic researchers seem to agree on some common elements: repetition, a power imbalance, and (serious) harm (see Carrera, DePalma, and Lameiras, 2011; Greene, 2000; Griffin and Gross, 2004; Stassen Berger, 2007). These three elements come from the work of Dan Olweus, whose definition of bullying—"intentional, repeated, negative (unpleasant or hurtful) behavior by one or more persons directed against a person who has difficulty defending himself or herself" (Olweus and Limber, 2010, p. 125)—is often cited. This definition, and the three elements associated with it, remain dominant in the bullying literature (see, for instance, Griffin and Gross, 2004; Horton, 2006; Schoen and Schoen, 2010; Volk et al., 2012).

However, Carrera, DePalma, and Lameiras caution that "the notions of intentionality, repetition, and power imbalance, while accepted and employed in the majority of bullying research, remain subject to a cer-

tain lack of consensus within the academic community" (2011, p. 486). The lack of consensus seems to be more an issue of measurement than of conceptual consistency. It isn't that researchers are unable to agree on these fundamental elements of bullying as much as they are unable to come to agreement regarding the ways in which they should be measured. As Stassen Berger suggests: "The triad cited earlier—harmful, repeated, unequal—is generally accepted but specifics are not. For example, how often, [and] within what time period, must incidents be repeated to cross the line from occasional unpleasantness to bonafide bullying" (2007, p. 100). As we will see, news media and other claimsmakers have not come to consensus either.

Analytic Themes

Our analysis of news media constructions of school bullying led to three important analytic themes. First, bullying became subject to domain expansion, whereby its meaning grew in various directions. Second, the causes of and social control responses to bullying shifted unsteadily among different explanatory levels, from the individual to the cultural. Last, the media and its claimsmakers oversimplified bullying in numerous ways. Each of these three processes occurred in an interdependent fashion and within a competitive news media environment. Each also occurred in the context of a continuous expansion of harm that worked to construct school bullying as an ever-growing and ever-worsening epidemic, and had implications for which formal and informal social control responses were deemed most appropriate.

Analytic Theme 1: Domain Expansion

Domain expansion can happen in a number of ways. *Substantive* domain expansion occurs when areas not originally thought of as aspects of the problem become incorporated through claimsmaking activities. It "involves rendering more and more conduct and/or social conditions 'at issue'" (Jenness, 1995, p. 233) and is an expansion of the "substantive territory" of the problem (Grattet, Jenness, and Curry, 1998). For example, Weitzer (2007) demonstrated how the original social problem of sex trafficking first expanded to take in prostitution—even when legally sanctioned—and then pornography. Best (1990) delineated the process by which the rather narrow "battered child" typ-

ification was expanded first to "child abuse" and then further to "child abuse and neglect." This shift was accomplished through deliberate and coordinated claimsmaking activities. But Best (1990, pp. 75–77) also provided a number of examples of entities outside the movement applying the label "child abuse" to a wide variety of conditions and behaviors that were likely unforeseen by the primary claimsmakers, such as circumcision, violence in rock music, and inadequate social services. Coincidentally, we found an instance of the news media referring to bullying as "a disturbing form of child abuse" (ABC's *Good Morning America,* January 19, 1999).

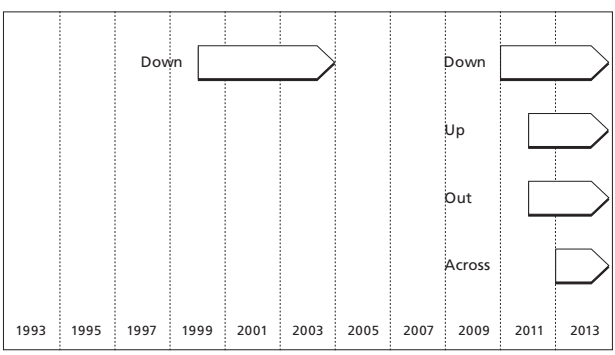
In terms of substantive domain expansion, definitions and applications of school bullying have expanded in four ways. The first kind of substantive domain expansion involves defining school bullying *down,* and it has occurred in two ways: (1) inclusion of behaviors that are probably unproblematic, such as apparently consensual "teasing" and "horseplay"; and (2) inclusion of youth conflicts that lack a traditional element of bullying, such as a power differential or repeated behavior (e.g., arguments and "drama" could be recast as bullying).[3] Interestingly, concerns about defining down emerged at the same time that news media began to define bullying *up* by conflating it with behaviors between or among youth that they had previously constructed as solely criminal. We found many instances where news media claimsmakers labeled onetime aggravated assaults between people who had not previously met as "bullying." We also considered formal social control responses that criminalized "common" kinds of bullying as a type of defining up if there were claims that they contributed to an extreme outcome such as a youth suicide. For instance, it is extremely unlikely that those who bullied Phoebe Prince would have been criminally charged had she not taken her life. The same can be said of Dharun Ravi's charges after the death of Tyler Clementi.

News media also engaged in defining *out* to include a wider range of individuals as likely bullies and victims. This sometimes was accomplished through reporting on academic studies that purported to enlarge the scope of potential bullies and victims. For example, several media outlets featured the research of Robert Faris and Diane Felmlee, sociologists at the University of California–Davis, who claim that bullying is a widespread and normative practice among most students and constitutes a process by which they jockey for social power and status. In addition to academics, other claimsmakers defined bullying out. For

instance, some claimed that everyone has been a bully or a victim (or both) at some point. The fourth substantive domain expansion uncovered in our analysis, defining *across,* occurred when school bullying was analogized to other kinds of matters, from the insignificant to the very serious. By the end of our study period, bullying was regularly being defined across many unrelated areas of social life; we found claims that both communism and the singing of religious Christmas carols constituted bullying. In other words, the term "bullying" had become a catchall for any perceived form of abuse of power, regardless of quality or quantity (see also Horton, 2006). As depicted in Figure 1.1, while instances of defining bullying down occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it wasn't until around 2009 that news media constructions of school bullying began to articulate all four kinds of domain expansion in quick succession and ultimately simultaneously. As we point out later in this book, these four types of domain expansion served to further confuse the news media discourse.

A second type of domain expansion, *rationale* expansion, was also evident in our analysis. Rationale expansion involves adding justifications for why certain conditions are objectionable. Kunkel (1999) showed how animal rights movements originally relied on arguments against "cruelty to animals" in opposing vivisection and factory farming. When this claim did not create sufficient traction, the activists expanded their rhetoric to incorporate concerns more likely to connect with the public, such as threats to the environment and misuse of tax money. In an analysis of news media coverage of the Columbine school

Figure 1.1 Domain Expansion Across Time

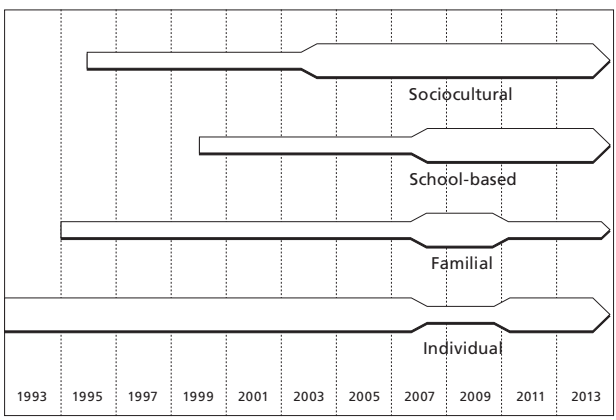


shootings, Muschert noted that the story was enlarged through an "expansion of the sphere of concern about Columbine-type crimes to include the wider national import of the crime" (2009, p. 169). In our analysis, we found that rationale expansion occurred when the media began to report on the homophobic *content* of bullying. Here, claims-makers asserted that bullying is "bad" because it reflects social intolerance. Both substantive and rationale expansion occurred simultaneously, but with different patterns of shifting focus.

Analytic Theme 2: Explanatory Shift

We found that the media's identification of the causes of bullying, and the suggested formal and informal social control responses thereto, shifted across various levels of explanation over time. In the broadcast media, we witnessed a general pattern (although not necessarily linear) over our study period (1992 to 2013). An individual focus was long favored, following which the attention turned to the larger society and culture then on to the familial and institutional (schools) level, and finally returned to the individual. At each stage, the prior causal explanations and social control responses were not completely abandoned. Thus, by the end of our study period there were several competing discourses that the news media made little attempt to reconcile or integrate, as illustrated in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 Explanations for Bullying Across Time



Analytic Theme 3: Oversimplification

School bullying is perhaps best understood as a complex constellation of processes that flow out of everyday behaviors and interactions, which themselves almost always involve some degree of conflict. Mishna (2012) exposes myriad contradictions and complexities, referring to the "phenomena" rather than the "phenomenon" of school bullying. As evidenced by the news media discourse, it is often difficult to determine exactly when "normal behavior" becomes problematic, which leads to bullying being identified with a wide range of behaviors that may in actuality require a wide range of responses.

Add to this the paradox of youth violence discussed later, and we begin to see just how difficult it is to balance the drive to help kids make better decisions and solve their own problems, with the drive to protect them from being harmed by their peers or themselves. Attempts to distill the complexity of school bullying down to a single phenomenon is inherently problematic and leads to the kinds of confusion that we suggest have plagued news media and popular discourse during the past two decades.

Implications

These three analytic themes are interrelated in ways that have serious implications for our understanding of and responses to school bullying. Through domain expansion, important distinctions are ignored. As playful and consensual teasing is conflated with serious violence, for instance, nuanced responses grounded in the inherent differences among these kinds of behaviors are jettisoned for mechanisms of control over individual students. Institutional and sociocultural responses—which could be both numerous and thorny—are dismissed or ignored in favor of increasingly punitive individual-level responses that mirror criminal justice practices. Responsibility for preventing school bullying, historically within the purview of schools and parents, shifts to the state through legislation, then to the federal level as policymakers take the stage to consider laws or regulations that mandate state requirements, and then down to the individual through the process of criminalization. Kids, of course, are easy targets, because they lack power to construct their own realities or define their own situations in ways that inform or problematize the public discourse. Thus they are the ultimate "docile bodies" in that they "can be subjected, used, transferred, and improved" (Foucault, 1977, p. 136) without the inconvenience of having to recognize their own lived experiences.

The end result is a distorted, confused, and conflicted discourse that fails to reconcile the complexity of school bullying with attempts to effectively address its root causes. It is clear to us that the term "bullying" has become so ubiquitous in popular discourse that its meaning has been blurred to the point that any and all problematic behavior on the part of today's youth can become emblematic of the growing epidemic of school bullying. Throughout this book, we explore the consequences of this ubiquity. More specifically, we explore the construction of school bullying as a social problem within news media discourse over the past two decades. In so doing, we trace the evolution of the discourse of school bullying, from its construction as a relatively innocuous part of adolescent development, to its construction as a serious social problem in need of widespread, large-scale policy remedies at the local, state, and national levels, with the ultimate effect of reestablishing informal and formal mechanisms for the social control of youth.

However, in line with the view through our contextual constructionist lens, it is not enough to simply describe the process through which school bullying came to be constructed as a serious social problem; we must also address "how broad cultural values, assumptions, expectations, and the like are employed and, in turn, given specific shape and meaning in this discourse" (Spencer, 2011, p. 13). Like Spencer's recognition of "broad cultural understandings of youth, gender, violence, and the city as a social place" as "interpretive resources" (p. 14) for understanding media constructions of youth violence, our analysis identifies broader cultural understandings of youth aggression, gender, and sexuality as resources for the construction of school bullying as a social problem.

Youth Aggression

It is our contention that responses to school bullying are grounded in long-standing attempts to control youth behavior. In addition, the discourse of school bullying taps into competing constructions of youth as both vulnerable and dangerous. For example, Daniel Scruggs was a 12-year-old boy who regularly was sent to school unbathed (*NYT,* September 27, 2003). Once there, he was mercilessly bullied and would defecate in his pants so that he would be sent home. In the months before his suicide, he missed forty-four days of school. Scruggs died by suicide in 2003 by hanging himself in the family home. Critics blamed his mother for Daniel's condition and his school for failure to act. More recently, in 2012, middle school students peppered their bus monitor,

Karen Klein, with insults that were shockingly heartless and obscene. The ten-minute video of the incident needs to be viewed in its entirety to understand the everyday depravity into which young people can sometimes sink.

The stories of Scruggs and Klein present the conundrum of how children can be simultaneously seen as both helpless, naive innocents in need of protection and also as violent predators in need of social control. As one newspaper put it: "We protect children from danger, from drugs, from disease. But how do we protect them from each other?" (*Berkshire Eagle,* February 26, 2011). Spencer (2011) terms this uneasy pairing the "paradox of youth violence." One common means of solving the paradox is to create a false binary that categorizes children as either "good" or "bad," with the goal being to protect the good ones and to punish or "fix" the bad ones, as seen in our case studies. Even if this construction were tenable, which it isn't, it would not address the question of how "bad" children come to be that way, or what to do about it. Differing answers to these questions direct differing social policies. The child savers of the Victorian age believed that "children are more sinned against than sinning" and thus "they are what they have been brought up to be" (*Our Sydney Letter,* 1911). In this formulation, the most compassionate response is to change the conditions under which children live. We find echoes of this sentiment as of this writing, but more common are "get tough" policies that focus on punishment rather than on addressing etiology.

The idea of treating schoolchildren like criminals may seem extreme. However, such an approach has gained considerable traction considering the rather bleak but rather common view expressed in news media that youth aggression simply comes from "the pitilessness of childhood . . . [and] is most likely a constant quantity" (*NYT,* March 3, 2013). News media and other claimsmakers constantly evoke a sense that youth violence is on the rise even as juvenile offense rates are dropping. The resulting "moral panic" of youth violence (Schissel, 1997) has led to an increase in the forms, methods, and severity of informal and formal social control directed at children. Casella (2001) calls this the "kid crackdown"; this is highly evident in US schools, which have become militarized through physical means (metal detectors and armed security officers) and through draconian policies such as "zero tolerance" (Robbins, 2008).

But schools have not acted in a vacuum. Agents of formal social control—lawmakers, law enforcers, courts, and the juvenile justice system—have enabled this increasing punitivity, some of which has surely

"trickled down" from the adult justice system. Approximately 100,000 children are now arrested annually in US schools, a disciplinary response that appears to have been encouraged by the increasing number of armed school resource officers stationed in schools (see Justice Policy Institute, 2011). NBC's *20/20* questioned this mixture of "cops and kids" in a broadcast that featured a 12-year-old student who was arrested for doodling on her desk and a 5-year-old arrested for throwing a tantrum (September 28, 2012). Similarly, CNN reported that a 7-year-old was arrested for stealing another student's lunch money (*Newsroom,* January 31, 2013). The courts have also abetted the kid crackdown. For instance, in 2002 the US Supreme Court upheld random (suspicionless) drug testing of children as young as middle school age, finding that the policy's social purposes outweighed students' privacy interests under the Fourth Amendment.

Furthermore, federal and state legislators increasingly set local school policies. For instance, one early impetus for zero tolerance was the 1994 Gun Free Schools Act, which tied federal education aid to a requirement that schools institute a one-year expulsion policy for firearm possession. Three years later, 94 percent of US public schools had zero-tolerance policies for firearms, 91 percent for other weapons, 88 percent for drugs, and 87 percent for alcohol (Kaufman et al., 2000). The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Common Core standards adopted by most states have opened up more space for regulation at both the state and federal levels. Walton refers to "the great tide of accountability" that has swept schools, resulting in "cultures of authoritarianism and control, not only in codes of student conduct but in curriculum as well" (2005, p. 111). There is no shortage of book-length critiques of these policies, such as *Responding to School Violence* (Muschert et al. 2014), *Punishing Schools* (Lyons and Drew, 2006), *Lockdown High* (Fuentes, 2011), *Governing Through Crime* (Simon, 2007), and *Police in the Hallways* (Nolan, 2011). However, the policies remain widely prevalent.

Walton (2005) suggests that peer violence flows expectedly when hierarchical relations are combined with social oppression and a "might makes right" attitude. Although Walton doesn't mention it, this idea has a rather clear counterpart in cultural criminology, which theorizes criminal behavior and other deviance as resistance to authority. We could easily appropriate the following description by replacing "crime" with "bullying": Crime is a way for one to break free from "one's demeaning and restraining circumstances, to exercise control and take responsibility for one's own destiny. In a world in which indi-

viduals find themselves over-controlled and yet without control, crime offers the possibility of excitement *and* control" (Jewkes, 2011, p. 33, emphasis in original).

Adorno (1998) adopts a more sustained theoretical critique of educational practices. His theory is too complex to be explained fully here, but we can illustrate the relevance of his broad argument to the current discussion. Adorno believes that schools are in a unique place to combat barbarism and fascism. However, he finds that these institutions replicate what he terms the hyper-fascism of late capitalism through the qualities of hardness, coldness, and alienation. "Hardness" is attained by inoculating students from their own pain and from the guilt of feeling the pain of others. "Coldness" engenders an indifference to and isolation from others. These characteristics are achieved through methods of violence (physical and psychological), among others. Psychological violence includes an atmosphere of hyper-competitiveness in which students are reduced to objects. As to physical violence, Adorno finds "hyper-masculine bullying" to be one means by which hardness and coldness are embodied. He writes: "The child who in school experiences coldness, anxiety, [and] the pressure of the collective, psychologically saves himself by displacing it onto others, and groups form in order, as it were, to pass this burden of alienation onto others" (1998, p. 296). Thus, for youth who are experiencing the continued growth of educational militarism and its associated mechanisms of informal and formal social control, it is not too far a stretch to suggest that school bullying serves as a form of resistance. It is our contention that the very forms of control imposed *by* adults *on* youth are repurposed as a mechanism of informal social control employed *by youth* to enforce conformity in ways that mimic broader cultural discourses, especially around gender and sexuality.

Gender

Much of the mainstream academic and popular discourse of gender continues to be oriented around a fundamental distinction between sex as biologically determined and gender as a social construction. According to Beasley: "Gender in this setting was seen as a reference to 'social construction.' The word implied a radical critique of conservative views that asserted biological determinism" (2005, p. 13). Prior to the sex-gender split, purported biological dimorphism (i.e., the existence of two distinct sexes) both explained and justified gendered social structures.

There is no doubt that feminist and other scholars have done incredible work in weakening the hold of biological essentialism by situating gender as a social construction in contrast to biological sex. However, recent scholarship suggests that the sex-gender split suffers from its own limitations.

First, this split serves to further entrench the notion that biological sex is static and in no way impacted by social or cultural dynamics. In an attempt to challenge prevailing biological essentialism, the sex-gender dichotomy both opened the space for a discussion of the social construction of gender and, to some extent, closed the door on explorations of how biological sex is also in many ways socially constructed. Second, the sex-gender split has not wholly moved us away from sexual dimorphism. As Messerschmidt points out, scholars continue to assume "that there exist only two 'natural' sexes (male and female) and, therefore, but two genders (masculine and feminine)" (2006, p. 36). This leads to a third limitation—the continued conflation of sex and gender. If the categories of male and female represent innate biological realities, and two corresponding genders exist in ways that mirror those biological realities through social and cultural expressions, then what is the difference between sex and gender? Put differently, if all the things male-bodied individuals do, say, and think are viewed through the lens of masculinity and all the things female-bodied individuals do, say, and think are viewed through the lens of femininity, then what is articulated as the social construction of gender is actually just a different language through which we perpetuate sex and gender binaries.

What is perhaps most missing from the discourse of the sex-gender dichotomy is recognition that both are in fact social constructions. What many believe to be concrete biological traits that establish someone as either male or female are better understood as culturally embedded characteristics that work to reify gender (Messerschmidt, 2006). It is not that biology does not exist as physical reality. However, the degree to which biology is used to determine who is male and who is female is a choice made in particular social and cultural contexts and not in others (see also Cohen, 2008; Cohen and Martin, 2012).

Instead of eliminating biological essentialism, the sex-gender dichotomy has in many ways worked to make implicit what was previously explicit. While scholars, activists, and individuals work to fight the existence of gender stratification and discrimination across multiple arenas (e.g., work, politics, and family), many unwittingly reinforce established binaries. These dynamics have led some scholars to rethink the goal of feminist movements and call for what Lorber refers to as a

"feminist degendering movement" in which we begin to "think beyond gender to the possibilities of a non-gendered social order" (2000, p. 81). As we will see in Chapter 5, such a social order is far from the current reality of the lived experience of youth.

The very fact that gendered norms and gendered bodies must be continually renegotiated and reinforced is itself an indication of gender as a social construction. In other words, if gender were indeed the result of innate biological differences between two distinct sexes, then there would be no need to continually police the boundaries of appropriate behavior along gendered lines. Building on Butler's work (2009), however, we posit that the use of bullying as a mechanism for the informal social control of gendered norms is part and parcel of gender and sex as social constructions, and, more to the point, as performance. Gender and sex are something that we *do,* not something that we *are*. As such, "there is no gender without [the] reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways, thus opening the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines" (Butler, 2009, p. i). Of course, those who violate gender norms are placed in a precarious position. As Butler suggests, "Those who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk for harassment and violence. Gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space" (p. ii).

By understanding gender and sex as social constructions that require both performance and constant renegotiation, we open the space for three important insights. First, both sex and gender are more fluid than we often acknowledge. Second, both are confluences of distinct yet interrelated phenomena operating at micro (individual) and macro (sociocultural) levels. Third, and perhaps most relevant for our analysis of school bullying, gender and sex, like any other social construction, require persistent maintenance and monitoring, especially during adolescence, when individuals are exploring the boundaries of normativity and establishing more concrete identities. As we will explore in more detail in Chapter 5, school bullying serves as one mechanism through which the social construction of gender is monitored and maintained. In other words, school bullying serves as a form of informal social control employed by adolescents to police peer behavior and establish the boundaries of gender normativity. Violation of gender normativity is deeply implicated in bullying victimization in schools, especially for girls and young women who violate norms of appearance and sexual behavior. To put it more simply, bullying is one mechanism through which girls are taught what are acceptable female bodies and behaviors.

Sexuality

Similar to their views on gender, most contemporary scholars reject the essentialist notion that sexuality can be reduced to a biological drive that exists irrespective of culture or era. Rather, sexual life is subject to a "socio-cultural molding . . . surpassed by few other forms of human behavior" (Gagnon and Simon, 1973, p. 26), and thus sexuality can only be understood within its own time, place, and cultural and political context. For example, what is sexually appropriate or taboo is not fixed but highly contingent—it is not "deviant" until it has been labeled so (Greenberg, 1988). This is not to say that because sexuality is socially constructed that sexual identities are not real or significant (Vance, 1989). In fact, sexual attitudes and practices can have deep subjective meanings for individuals, but those meanings are inextricably bound up in the larger social and cultural context in which they take place. Even if the *etiology* of sexual desire were found to lie mostly in physiology, the *meanings* that are attached to sexuality would nevertheless vary over time, place, and culture.

One of the most important contributions of the constructionist perspective is the idea that the labeling of sexual behavior creates imbalances of power (e.g., Foucault, 1978). The kind of power envisioned here arises not from overt state action but from individuals' internalization of prevailing discourses and the resulting surveillance of self and others (see Foucault, 1977). We are our own (and each other's) policing agent. One of the most powerful sexual discourses involves hetero-normativity, which includes two related ideas: there are two "kinds" of people (heterosexuals and homosexuals), and heterosexuality is normal and homosexuality is deviant. These claims seem natural to most people only because they are deeply entrenched and continually enacted or performed. The locus of discourse condemning homosexuality as deviant was first based in religious notions of sin. Around the turn of the twentieth century, a medicalized model based in pathology gained ground, adding to but not replacing the religious model (see Greenberg, 1988). Each discourse is stigmatizing (and thus exerts control) in its own way. In the latter part of the twentieth century, the medical model began to erode but homosexuality was "repathologized" (at least among gay men) due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Conrad and Angell, 2004); what we now call "AIDS" was initially termed "GRID" (gay-related immune deficiency). In fact, homosexuality itself has sometimes been labeled a "contagion" that will infect young people if not stemmed (see Knauer, 2006). Thus, both religious and medical discourses continue to hold a great deal of power.

Hetero-normativity creates many incongruities. Heterosexuality is constructed as an innate and natural orientation, while homosexuality is sometimes claimed to be a choice. Indeed, even when homosexuality is acknowledged as shaped by biology, some nevertheless find it similar to harmful or deviant conditions or behaviors that also have a biological influence. Ken Buck, a Colorado candidate for US Senate, combined both of those constructions when he said, "Birth has an influence over [homosexuality] like alcoholism and some other things, but I think that basically you have a choice" (CNN's *Newsroom,* October 18, 2010). In an indication that countervailing discourses have developed, anchor Kyra Phillips asked rhetorically: "Mr. Buck, let me ask you a question. If sexual orientation is a choice, when did you choose to be straight?"

While the LGBT movement has had some success with establishing a counter-discourse that challenges homosexuality as sinful or psychologically disordered (the second component of hetero-normativity), it has expended less effort to challenge the first component of hetero-normativity—the essentialist idea that there are two "types" of sexual beings. The most obvious reason is that it is easier to build a movement when identity is not problematized. Notwithstanding this acquiescence by many LGBT activists, constructionists have convincingly demonstrated that the dualism of hetero- and homosexuality is deeply problematic, for several reasons. First, it is a false binary that ignores sexual fluidity. Longitudinal survey studies have shown that changes in sexual identity over the life course are not uncommon (e.g., Garofalo et al., 1999; Laumann et al., 1994), with greater fluidity of identity among women (e.g., Diamond, 2003). In addition, essentialism fails to take into account bisexuality and also that bisexuality itself can be more complicated than it may appear (e.g., Berkey, Perelman-Hall, and Kurdek [1990] propose a model with six types of bisexuality). The second problem with essentialism is that sexual orientation has at least three chief and distinct components: identity, desire, and behavior. The three are oftentimes conflated, even by researchers. For example, some surveys of sexuality ask about a respondent's identity while others inquire into behavior, but both surveys claim to measure the same concept. However, the three components do not always align in expected ways. Same-sex sexual behavior does not necessarily coincide with a gay or lesbian identity (Ellis, Robb, and Burke, 2005; Laumann et al., 1994). Contemporary examples include relatively high proportions of men in some Latino cultures whose behavior is bisexual but whose identity is heterosexual. This split of identity from behavior accommodates male-

male sexual relations while also serving an important cultural goal—creation and maintenance of a nuclear family (see Gonzalez and Espin, 1996; Rust, 2000).

Last, it is important to note that hetero-normativity also shapes a great deal of our behavior that is not at all sexual, largely because it is tied to gender ideologies. Sexuality and gender are inextricably interrelated; Schwartz and Rutter (2000) refer to this conflation as "the gender of sexuality." We use the term *hetero-masculinity,* as do Anderson, Adams, and Rivers (2010), to underscore that this conflation applies especially to men, for whom any behavior or identity considered as homosexual marks a man as feminine. Men are thus doubly stigmatized through a combination of "femphobia" and homophobia. Hetero-masculinity imposes strict gender roles and causes heterosexual men to go to great lengths to avoid creating any perception that they are gay—thus, for example, they maintain physical and emotional distance from other men and display orthodox forms of masculinity. To maintain their dominance, then, heterosexual men must avoid any behavior, thought, or desire associated with homosexuality (see Butler, 1990), and remain "100% straight" (Messner, 2002, p. 42). Importantly, hetero-masculinity also has effects on the behavior of gay and bisexual men, who either remain closeted or, if they are "out," adopt some of the practices of normative masculinity, such as weightlifting. Research shows that hetero-masculine norms lead gay men to "defeminize" themselves during adolescence; if they show effeminate traits as adults, they risk marginalization, even from other gay men (see Taywaditep, 2002). In Chapter 6 we detail how these dynamics are also at play among boys. Like gender normativity, hetero-masculinity requires persistent maintenance and monitoring. As a result, bullying also serves as a form of informal social control employed by adolescents to police the boundaries of hetero-masculinity. Violation of hetero-normativity is deeply implicated in bullying victimization in schools, especially for boys and young men who violate or are perceived to violate norms of hetero-masculinity, whether or not they self-identify as gay (and even whether or not they are presumed to be gay) (e.g., McMaster et al., 2002; Timmerman, 2003). To put it more simply, bullying is a part of boys' gender and sexual socialization and is one mechanism through which they are taught what are acceptable straight male behaviors (see Pascoe, 2013).

It is vitally important to keep in mind that youth have not established these gender or hetero-masculine norms on their own. Quite to the contrary, these norms are learned through various cultural means, among them news media discourse. As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6,

news media and other claimsmakers actively, if not intentionally, position some youth as more or less deserving of bullying based on real or perceived violations of gender and hetero-masculine norms. While it may be easy to blame young people for employing bullying as a mechanism of social control, the reality is that these messages are born out of a social and cultural milieu heavily influenced by adult discursive constructions. Schoolchildren learn gender and hetero-masculine norms in part through an internalization of adult discursive constructions, many of which are consistently and vociferously articulated in news media coverage of school bullying. Through this lens, school bullying is no longer viewed as a form of deviance, but rather as an implicitly and explicitly accepted mechanism of social control aimed at enforcement of gender and hetero-masculine norms.

Structure of the Book

In the remainder of this book we dig more deeply into news media constructions of school bullying as a social problem. In Chapter 2 we explore early constructions of school bullying as an individual-level problem. We examine how these early constructions situated school bullying as the result of individual pathology and worked to define bullying up, down, and out in ways that brought an ever-increasing number of individuals into its ambit. We also note the various ways in which victims, bullies, and victim-bullies have been constructed as deviant others. In Chapters 3 and 4 our focus turns to the shift from individual to sociocultural explanations for school bullying. In particular, in Chapter 3 we explore the construction of school bullying as a public health epidemic. In Chapter 4 we explore how this epidemic frame supported explanations for school bullying that included familial, institutional, and cultural failure. In Chapters 5 and 6 we turn our attention to contextualizing the construction of school bullying as a social problem by focusing on how it serves as an arena for the ongoing discourse of gender, sexuality, and social control. Relying on two case studies, we articulate how gender, sexuality, and social control serve both explicitly and implicitly as interpretive resources for news media constructions of school bullying. In Chapter 7 we switch gears to discuss the news media's active role in constructing school bullying as a social problem, through an analysis of the news production process. Included in this chapter is an analysis of the anti-bullying industry as seen through the lens of media waves. Finally, in Chapter 8 we return to our chronologi-

cal account. We describe how the news media's re-individualization of school bullying has led to the imposition of mostly counterproductive forms of social control, such as zero-tolerance policies and criminalization. We end with suggestions for how we might begin to better define bullying through a more nuanced and complex framework grounded in the social-ecological approach, through which those most influenced by school bullying—youth—are more purposefully given a voice.

Notes

1. While the word "bullycide" was not widely adopted in the media and is also not technically grammatically appropriate (it actually suggests the killing of bullies), it is used here as a convenient shorthand. The earliest use of the term we know of was in Marr and Field's 2001 study. However, various other persons were credited with its invention in the media transcripts that we reviewed. The eponymous host of CNN's *Issues with Jane Velez-Mitchell* (April 8, 2010) referred to the death of Phoebe Prince as part of a "sick trend [that] has even coined a new term, bullycide." The next day on the same program. Velez-Mitchell credited the creation of the term to Sirdeaner Walker, the mother of an 11-year-old student, Carl Walker-Hoover Jr., who died by suicide in Massachusetts about nine months before Phoebe Prince took her own life, in a city about thirty miles from Prince's. (Interestingly, six months earlier on her program, on November 25, 2008, Velez-Mitchell said that she had "just learned" a new phrase: "cyber-bullycide.") In any event, the term was not new in 2010 nor was it coined by Walker. "Bullycide" appears for the first time in our transcripts in 2003 in an interview of Barbara Coloroso, author of *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander,* on CBS's *Early Show* (March 3, 2003). Also that year, the *New York Times* (October 2, 2003) quoted a prosecutor as saying the following to a jury: "You have heard the term suicide. . . . But you wonder if a more appropriate term was bullicide."

2. Unless otherwise indicated, any italicized words within quotes from news media transcripts represent our own emphasis.

3. We do not mean to say that these distinctions are easily made. As we argue in Chapter 8, any approach to understanding bullying requires a great deal of nuance and flexibility, including a recognition that bullying is on a continuum of behaviors and thus "bleeds into" behaviors that are of great concern as well as behaviors that are of little concern.