Policy and perception: Cyberbullying in the Nova Scotian context

Thesis

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Abstract

This study explored definitions and conceptualizations of cyberbullying in Nova Scotian social, cultural, and legal contexts to highlight the inefficacy of currently-instituted prevention and intervention strategies. Following the framework of social learning as defined by symbolic interactionism, this study utilized feminist and semiotic theories to analyze laws, images, and the perceptions of cyberbullying found in Nova Scotia, Canada. Included in the research were 32 participants gathered through purposeful and convenience sampling methods that represented the perspectives of Nova Scotian youth, parents, teachers, law enforcement representatives, and government officials. Ultimately, this research determined that Nova Scotian perceptions of cyberbullying are disconnected, convoluted, and skewed by media and social influences weighted in gender inequality and the sexualization of women and girls. Current prevention and intervention strategies fail to account for the collective perspectives of Nova Scotians, and so if Nova Scotia hopes to better address cyberbullying in future, it must continue in its efforts to establish a focused, unified definition within our province, and subsequently the awareness and education of it for all Nova Scotians, not only our youth.

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Cyberbullying in Canada

      A 2005 survey found that of over 5000 students between the ages of four and 11, 99%

had at least one computer in their home; further, internet use had increased from 79% in 2001 to

94% in 2005 (Noseworthy & Rinaldi, 2013). A separate study found that 30% of children in

grades four through six have a Facebook account, and 16% have a Twitter account— "in spite of

the age restrictions associated with these forms of social media" (Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015,

p.126). Additionally, 24% of fourth graders, 31% of fifth graders, and 38% of sixth graders

report owning a cellphone with internet capabilities (Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015); of those

remaining, the majority will own phones by grade eight (Noseworthy & Rinaldi, 2013). With the

increasing development and use of technology, the number of reports of cyberbullying in Canada

is growing. While some studies have indicated that 29% of Canadian youth have experienced

cyberbullying, and 47% have witnessed it (Noseworthy & Rinaldi, 2013), there is little

consistency in the frequency of cyberbullying experienced in Canada reported in recent

literature. Tanya Beran, Faye Mishna, Lauren McInroy and Shaheen Shariff (2015), for instance,

have argued that one in seven children between the ages of 10 and 17 are likely to be victims of

cyberbullying; Brett Holfeld and Bonnie Leadbeater (2015) state in their study that it is "at least

one in five" (p.121); meanwhile, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (2012) suggest that

one in every three adolescent students in Canada have reported being bullied recently. While the

varying data surrounding the frequency of cyberbullying in Canada all suggest that it is a prolific

issue in need of the utmost concern and attention, collectively they point to a deeper issue of

convoluted and inconsistent understandings of the cyberbullying phenomenon itself.

Cyber safety in Nova Scotia

In 2013, Nova Scotia introduced Bill No. 61—an act to address and prevent cyberbullying—and the Nova Scotia Task Force on Bullying and Cyberbullying; both initiatives were the first of their kind in the province's cyberbullying prevention and policy. In their report, *Respectful and Responsible Relationships: There's No App for That,* the Task Force (2012) noted that:

> The problems of bullying and cyberbullying in particular are a world-wide phenomenon and are growing in prominence (…) In a presentation to the Senate Human Rights Committee on Bullying and Cyberbullying, the President of Bullying.org indicated that there are 252,000 cases of bullying per month in Canadian high schools (…) Out of 35 countries, Canada ranked 26th on bullying and 27th on victimization. This suggests that Canada's bullying interventions have not been as successful as anti-bullying campaigns in other countries. (p.4-16)

As a twist of irony, Bill No.61—commonly known as the Nova Scotia Cyber-Safety Act—established in 2013, has itself proven unsuccessful in combatting cyberbullying in Canada. In December 2015, the Supreme Court nullified the Nova Scotia Cyber-Safety Act for failing to define cyberbullying appropriately and explicitly (Ruskin, 2015): "the definition of the cyberbullying in the act was called a 'colossal failure' in the [Supreme Court] ruling" (Quigley, 2016, n.p.). The Task Force (2012) definition stated that "cyberbullying is a form of bullying, and occurs through the use of technology. This can include the use of a computer or other electronic devices, using social networks, text messaging, instant messaging, websites, e-mail or other electronic means" (p.42-43). The Task Force (2012) noted that the definition of cyberbullying "sparked considerable debate and discussion" (p.40) among their own network

during its creation; the problem now, however, is that the confusion has led to a void in any

formal legislative protection in place for Nova Scotian youth specifically against cyberbullying.

Wayne MacKay, Chair of the Task Force has indicated that he has noticed a surge in

cyberbullying since the law was struck down in December: "I feel really bad about that because I

know how serious it is and how it has a negative impact on [youths'] lives. They feel they have

no place to turn" (quoted in MacIvor, 2016). Society is turning to educational systems to step up

and fill the void of protection for their students (Beran et al., 2015), and significant changes were

made to educational policies and procedures as well (NSTF, 2012)—changes that were informed

and dependent upon the active Cyber Safety Act.

Defining cyberbullying has been difficult for professionals and scholars in Canada, but

for the Nova Scotia Cyber-Safety Act specifically, there were several core elements that were

overlooked. Emerging research in online aggression is drawing stronger links between sexual

violence and online spaces (Fairbairn, 2015); indeed, what was previously held under the

umbrella-term "cyberbullying" can manifest as a digital form of sexual abuse—a phenomenon

overlooked by the former Bill No. 61 according to Alexa Dodge (2015):

> For instance, cyberbullying that takes the form of the dissemination of photographs of
>
> sexual assault will be referred to as instances of online sexual violence. It is important to
>
> recognize that not only can online sexual violence be used as a way of extending the
>
> trauma of sexual assault, but that it is also a form of sexual violence in and of itself. (p.3)

In this vein of thought, we must consider the role of digital images and audiences in the

experiences of Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons— both tragically committing suicide after

explicit photos of them were disseminated digitally, sparking further harassment online. These

cases, despite their evidence of sexual violence, have been recognized as two of the most widely-

known cases of "cyberbullying" in Canada (Dodge, 2015). The tragic stories of these two young

women indicate that there are many layers to what has been socially and legally understood as

"cyberbullying"—including gendered experiences and sexual violence— and how inconsistency

in perception and policy is detrimental to Canadian youth. Despite being inspired by Todd and

Parsons's stories, the former Cyber Safety Act in Nova Scotia failed to make a distinction

between various forms of online violence and establish concrete legal boundaries (Quigley,

2016); the resultant prevention and intervention strategies Bill No.61 suggested did not reflect a

sound consideration of the diverse perspectives of youth, parents, teachers and school

administrators, and law enforcement officers affected by cyberbullying, and the likelihood that

they would feel comfortable and equipped to use such strategies to address it.

Objectives

By exploring traditional and current definitions and conceptualizations of cyberbullying in social and legal contexts, the goal of this research was to highlight how current prevention and intervention strategies in Nova Scotia fail to account for the varying perspectives of all groups they affect, and that this consideration must take place for any future efforts to be successful. Noseworthy and Rinaldi (2013) suggest that there is an ever-evolving need to revisit the definition of cyberbullying, not only because of changing technologies, but considering conflicting social, cultural, and legal understandings of the phenomenon. Rather than only looking at cyberbullying through one lens, I evaluate it from three different positions—social, cultural, and legal—within which the perspectives of students, their parents, teachers and school administrators, and government and law enforcement officers are reviewed. In the framework of symbolic interactionism, I posit that Canadian understandings of cyberbullying stem from these three perspectives, radiating in concentric circles from interpersonal communication to legislation: social interactions lead to cultural understandings, which influence legal definitions and decisions. Employing feminist theory and semiotics, this study argues that among the various perceptions of cyberbullying, misconceptions of gendered differences and sexualized online violence are among the most prevalent and pressing concerns. I will explore the recent history and current development of cyberbullying policy and legislation in light of the various perspectives within the social and cultural realm of the above-mentioned stakeholder groups with the objective to use these insights to suggest focused and appropriate prevention/intervention strategies that illustrate the need for formal policy and legislation surrounding cyberbullying in Canada.

Research Questions

- How is/was "cyberbullying" conceptualized and understood socially, culturally, and legally in Nova Scotia?

  o How do the perceptions of cyberbullying and responsibility—awareness-raising, education, and intervention/prevention—differ among various stakeholder groups? Specifically, students/youth, parents, teachers/school administrators, and law enforcement officers/law and policy officials.

  o What are the inherent differences between cyberbullying, and sexualized online harassment?

    ▪ What role do digital images play?

- How did Bill No.61 (The Cyber Safety Act) instituted in 2013 fail or succeed in its task, and what is the status of cyberbullying legislation in Nova Scotia?

  o How can better, more concrete, legal conceptualizations influence more cohesive and appropriate social/cultural understandings?

- What changes/considerations need to occur to ensure that the goals/intent of legislative/law developments are reflected in the creation and execution of education and intervention/prevention strategies?

Literature Review

Primary Considerations

Youth growing up today are bombarded with new technologies at an accelerating rate, and so they experience the best and the worst of the world's constant innovation—possibilities offered by new technologies, that while exciting, can be used as powerful weapons if put in the hands of misguided people (NSTF, 2012). Adolescents find themselves at great risk of a multiplicity of negative behaviours that are enhanced, if not encouraged, by technological communication's unique opportunities; and while increased technology has opened the doorway for cyberbullying, it is important to note that these behaviours themselves are not new: "technology merely offers new ways for committing traditional crime" (Powell, 2010, p.81). Author of *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens,* dana boyd [sic] (2014) gives a detailed overview of what numerous scholars refer to as the "affordances"—factors unique to technological communication. According to boyd, there are six: *persistence* and durability of online content; *visibility* and the potential for larger audiences; *spreadability* and the ease with which content can be shared; *searchability* and the option to find content; *mobility* and the potential for instances of bullying to occur virtually anywhere, and; *anonymity* and the potential for attackers to hide their identities. Of these six areas for study, anonymity has garnered the most popularity in research and literature. Christopher Wolf, an attorney with the Anti-Defamation League, put in a letter to the Editor of *The New York Times:* "People who are able to post anonymously (or pseudo anonymously) are far more likely to say awful things, sometimes with awful consequences" (quoted in Santana, 2014, p.19). Paramount among these consequences is cyberbullying and its potentially disastrous outcomes. Cyberbullying has resulted in significant psychological and social impact for both victims and bullies, has been

identified as a contributing factor for depression, and has been linked to several publicized

suicides in Canada alone (Moore, Nakano, Enomoto, & Suda, 2012).

Issues of social power are critical to understanding the complex nature of bullying

(Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2008), and cyberbullying. The *Nova Scotia Task Force on*

Bullying and Cyberbullying (NSTF) recognizes in its 2012 report to the provincial government

that, central to the notion of bullying, is a power differential and a drive to balance or exacerbate

power dynamics in some way. Attributing online communication and cyberspace to a context

that is "dynamic and often unpredictable" (NSTF, 2012, p.9), the Nova Scotia Task Force on

Bullying and Cyberbullying echoed widespread sentiments in cyberbullying research: that

cyberbullying intensifies victims' experiences by virtue of the very nature of cyberspace. June F.

Chisolm (2006) states that, "technology allows for the effects of bullying to spread quickly

throughout the online community, greatly intensifying the pressure and experience of harm,

humiliation, and/or exploitation" (p.82). Common to both traditional and technological forms of

bullying, however, is the power differential between bullies and their victims. Bullying and

power are linked in such significant and complex ways, that even the most disliked bully is

typically viewed as both popular and powerful.

Since much cyberbullying occurs while youth are at home, there seems to be greater

impetus on parents to intervene than was the case with traditional bullying (Broll & Huey, 2014).

However, despite their pivotal role in it, parents typically feel ill-equipped to respond to

cyberbullying (Hannah, 2010) since youth often understand the devices through which

cyberbullying occurs better than their parents. As many as 84% of current parents of youth are of

the perception that they are unable to determine how and when to respond to cyberbullying

because they didn't grow up with the same technologies as their children (Broll & Huey, 2014;

Hannah, 2010). A number of approaches have been advocated for state (in the US) and local governments, schools, families, and students to use when addressing cyberbullying, and according to John Snakenbog, Richard Van Acker, and Robert Gable (2011), these generally fall into three categories: (a) curricular programs to educate children and youth about safe internet and electronic media use and how to avoid and address cyberbullying; (b) laws, rules, and policies; and, (c) technological approaches to prevent or minimize the potential for cyberbullying. Since many social networking sites and tools Canadian youth engage with daily are actually American companies, enforcing technical conditions with the creators of these media is difficult for our country. As a result, Canadians place the most emphasis on creating preventative school curricula to educate students, and the development of comprehensive legislation.

Perspectives of Schools and Teachers

Critical incidents involving schools include shootings, suicide, road traffic accidents, major fires, and natural disasters, and many schools have developed crisis management frameworks and contingency plans to address these risks. However, these contingency plans are often constructed out of common sense, clinical judgment, or singular professional perspectives, and rarely reflect upon a systematic review of the evidence and risk (MacNeil & Topping, 2007). For crises like natural disasters and school-shootings, emergency services workers are trained and expected to handle the situation; however, what about crises that are less overt, but even more prolific—what about a crisis brought into the classroom every day by the students themselves?

Societal expectation in Canada that schools will be involved in the management of critical incidents that impact school children is not new (MacNeil & Topping, 2007). While

school boards often have broader policies related to behavior and discipline, few of them have

formal policies in place for dealing with bullying on a broader level. Even fewer resources and

guidance exists on how to address aggression on a non-traditional medium such as

cyberbullying: "schools are increasingly integrating and using technology as a means of learning

for students, parents, and teachers. However, not all boards have specifically or explicitly set

parameters around acceptable and unacceptable online behavior" (Noseworthy & Rinaldi, 2013,

p.510). Of six curricular programs discussed by Snakenborg, Van Acker, and Gable (2011), only

one such program was designed for teachers and school administrators. Most educators are at an

immediate disadvantage when it comes to addressing cyberbullying concerns in their schools,

due to the same "generational gap" (Cassidy, Brown, and Jackson, 2012, p.528) regarding

familiarity with technology that the students' parents feel. Teachers and parents are generally

behind youth in their knowledge of technology, which can restrict their ability to use the

technology in ways that foster adequate supervision and more respectful online behavior for

students (Cassidy et al, 2012).

Three significant challenges faced by schools to address cyberbullying are the

proliferation of social media and networking tools, the broad audience and reach of digitally

disseminated images, and the anonymity afforded to cyberbullies through electronic

communication. In addition, researchers have observed that cyberbullying may occur at any

given time and are documented to be more prevalent outside of school than within it (Couvillon

& Ilieva, 2011). Regardless, the Government of Nova Scotia (2013) has reported that Canadian

teachers ranked cyberbullying as their highest issue of concern from six listed options. Of

teachers interviewed, 89% of respondents suggest that bullying and cyberbullying are serious

problems in public schools; however, Cassidy, Brown, and Jackson (2012) conducted an in-

depth review of school-board cyberbullying policies in Alberta, including educator perceptions

and responses to cyberbullying in their schools, and the results were troubling:

> Although more than half of the educators said they were 'very concerned' or 'concerned'
>
> about cyberbullying, this concern had not translated into policy or programs, nor was it
>
> manifested in their knowledge of what was happening with their students in their schools.
>
> Four of the educators (two of them administrators) could not point to any incidences of
>
> cyberbullying, and several identified the same one or two examples. Given the fact that
>
> 36% of the students admitted to cyberbullying and 32% said they had been victimized, it
>
> can be safely said that the cyberbullying was happening under the educators' radar.
>
> Further, there was a seeming lack of interest in learning the results of our study with their
>
> students. Despite a concerted effort on our part to find suitable times to meet to share our
>
> findings with the staff and administration, not date at either school was set. Even our
>
> offer to send each school a written report was ignored. (Cassidy et al, 2012, p.528)

Many educators and school administrators still lack training in crisis intervention, or how to

recognize and make effective decisions under conditions of stress (MacNeil & Topping, 2007;

Cassidy et al., 2012), but that does not excuse a general disinterest in learning such skills.

Perhaps educator resistance to getting directly involved in anti-cyberbullying tactics stems from

a general belief that if a critical incident takes place or is initiated off school property, it is

beyond the responsibility of the school and its staff (Stauffer, Heath, Coyne, & Ferrin, 2012).

Among educators responding to the Nova Scotia Cyberbullying Task Force's (2012)

online survey, 75% of responders agreed that cyberbullying initiated away from school property

impacts in-school learning and behaviour, but less than 50% recognized a responsibility to deal

with cyberbullying initiated outside of school. Further, the same survey indicated that only 12%

of Nova Scotian educators feel they have the resources and skill-set to appropriately deal with

cyberbullying, compared to 38% who are prepared to directly address physical bullying (NSTF,

2012). This observation is supported by Cassidy, Brown, and Jackson (2012) who stress that

teachers are far more likely to prevent and address face-to-face bullying than cyberbullying. The

Task Force (2012) recommended an amendment to the Nova Scotia Education Act that would

clearly articulate expanded authority of schools to deal with matters of student misconduct

beyond school premises, including cyberbullying, but regardless, much of the new and reformed

school policies and procedures relied heavily on the support of the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act

and Task Force. With the authority of these two entities greatly diminished, or even stripped,

educators do not, *formally,* play as active a role in combatting cyberbullying as societal

expectations suggest. Nearly 60% of teachers interviewed by Sterling Stauffer, Melissa Heath,

Sarah Coyne, and Scott Ferrin (2012) indicated that they were either unsure about or against

implementing a formal bullying prevention program in their school; grappling to ensure the

safety of their students, parents and communities become frustrated by school responses to

cyberbullying involving their children and call the police out of desperation (Broll & Huey,

2014), resulting in more onus, responsibility, and expectation being placed on law enforcement.

Perspectives of Police Officers and Law Enforcement

Although some studies have suggested that much schoolyard bullying can be considered

criminal behavior, bullying has historically been excused as being a normal part of growing up,

and therefore, there was no expectation of legal intervention (Broll & Huey, 2014). Awareness

about cyberbullying and expectations that the police will always intervene have seemingly

increased in parallel over the past decade. In 2014, Ryan Broll and Laura Huey argued that

"individual officer perceptions about the relative importance of cyberbullying tell us much about

how these cases will be handled not only by police members, but by policing agencies and the

larger criminal justice system" (p.164). They observed that, regardless of political rhetoric on the

importance of treating cyberbullying as a criminal phenomenon, if police members do not adopt

a similar attitude and process cases accordingly, the criminalization of cyberbullying will likely

not happen.

Participants in Broll and Huey's (2014) interviews were unanimously of the view that

current laws already provide effective responses and most agreed that there is no need for

cyberbullying-specific laws. The Canadian federal government has contemplated criminalizing

cyberbullying, but police officers did not endorse such plans—instead, they expressed concern

about the burden that such laws will place on already strained criminal justice systems. In

particular, eight of 12 participants were concerned with the prospect of having to charge youth

for being mean to one another. In contrast to the firm-handed approach advocated for by many

politicians and lawmakers, even when charges are laid the police usually attempt to avoid the

courts whenever possible (Broll & Huey, 2014). Concepts of cyberbullying have been known to

include: threat of physical violence, abusive or hate-related name calling, death threats, ending of

platonic relationships, sexual acts, demands/instructions, threats to damage existing

relationships, threats to home/family, and menacing chain messages (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen,

2013). While this is not a definitive definition, what it and the definition of cyberbullying offered

by the *Nova Scotia Task Force on Bullying and Cyberbullying* make evident, is that general

conceptualizations of cyberbullying often include criminal behaviour. For the police officers

interviewed by Broll and Huey (2014):

> If new cyberbullying laws are created, half of the officers interviewed indicated that the
>
> legislation would need to be carefully crafted and include specific guidance regarding

what constitutes cyberbullying and how cyberbullying differs from threats or harassment.

The officers also explained that the legislation must clearly distinguish "minor" acts of

cyberbullying like name calling from more serious incidents requiring policing

intervention (…) the term cyberbullying is too generic to be of investigative value. (Broll

& Huey, 2014, p.165)

Definitional aspects of cyberbullying are frequently under debate, but the most frequent

behaviour reported by victims and cyberbullies is threatening or harassment (Slonje et al.,

2013)—actions that are typically considered criminal.

Gendered experiences online.

For youth and adolescents, communication is the most important use of the internet

(Chisolm, 2006); as they expand their use of social networking forums, they develop virtual

communities—digital organizations of various peer groups and dynamics. Interaction plays an

insurmountable role in producing social structures—when these interactions are between women

and men, patterns of dominance influence what we will refer to as "gendered" characteristics and

biases in these social structures (Acker, 1990)—notable observations and differences in

behaviour influenced by whether those involved identify as male or female. Perpetuating male

and female power imbalances, "social media sites become aggregators of online misogyny"

(Rentschler, 2014, p. 65). Despite optimism and excitement in the onset of its popularity, the

internet has never served as a forum of equal opportunity to all groups, and it remains gender-

segregated and inherently unfriendly for females in a multitude of capacities (Carstensen, 2009).

Tanja Carstensen (2009) suggests that men and boys are still given more attention academically,

socially, and professionally online, and additionally, this attention is often favourable in light of

female experiences. In a mixed-gender study where participants in online communication were

depersonalized and stripped of any overt gender identifiers, Tom Postmes and Russell Spears

(2002) hypothesized that gender imbalances might become less prevalent in mixed-gendered

interactions. Results indicated that the reverse effect is true:

> gender differences in dominance were actually most accentuated when group members
>
> were unable to individuate each other. Thus, when unable to make clear individual
>
> distinctions between group members, and unable to identify them as men or women,
>
> gender differences were more accentuated than when such individual distinctions could
>
> be made. (Postmes & Spears, 2002, p.1080)

The authors suggest that as female activity online increases, gender divides expand with it.

Across the literature, it is unanimously supported that regardless of the margins, there is a gender

divide in the accessibility and safety of online media, and that it is a disadvantage to females.

Despite this, Bill No. 61 made no specific reference to gender or how females are at higher risk

to be cyberbullied (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013). This indicates a grievous oversight in the

development of the Cyber Safety and Prevention Act, and the prevalent need for gender to be a

consideration in the Bill's amendment.

Sexual violence and non-consensual dissemination of images.

In Canada, the bulk of society, research, and criminal law employs "cyberbullying" as a

"one size fits all" model for negative experiences and behaviours within youth interaction online

(Mathen, 2014, p.531); however—as Janis Wolak, Kimberly Mitchell, and David Finkelhor

(2007) suggest—the concept of bullying or cyberbullying may not apply to all online

interpersonal offenses. Behaviours that may seem like bullying simply because they involve

youth can frequently cross the line and become crimes (Broll & Huey, 2014) and this is

especially true for female victims. Cyberbullying can manifest as a digital form of sexual

violence (Dodge, 2015) that poses as a serious and prolific problem for teen girls and women

globally (Angrove, 2015). Sexualized cyberbullying is a term that has been used to describe

bullying of a sexual nature. It has been defined as:

> unwanted sexual attention that makes the recipient feel uncomfortable, demeaned, or
>
> humiliated. Further, it is usually directed against females and can include gestures or
>
> communication, remarks about a person's body, sexual demands, and also includes
>
> criminal offences such as unwanted sexual touching, assault, and rape. (Angrove, 2015,
>
> p.312)

Before jumping into a detailed analysis of this definition, its application, and its implications, it

is beneficial to examine the context of sexualized cyberbullying in Canada, and some popular

cases that have been labeled as such.

  When studies report that girls are more likely to be targets of cyberbullying (Powell,

2010), the data is often construed by a misrepresentation of what is characteristically bullying,

and what is actually sexual harassment/violence. A recent report indicated that 81% of female

students have experienced some form of sexual harassment at some point during their school

lives (Espelage & Holt, 2007). Amanda Todd was among these victimized girls; after flashing

her breasts to a webcam, the 15-year-old British Columbian suffered a lengthy series of

demeaning, humiliating, and threatening responses from her peers and the public after photos

were leaked (Fyfe, 2014). Harassed, propositioned, ridiculed, humiliated, and scared, Todd's

case was vastly similar to one several months later in Nova Scotia—that of Rehtaeh Parsons.

Also 15 years-old at the onset of her abuse, Parsons made headlines across Canada when photos

of her alleged sexual assault were disseminated publicly as well— "a photo was taken of one of

the boys penetrating [Parsons] from behind while she was vomiting with her head stuck out of a window" (CBC News quoted in Dodge, 2015, p.1).

Despite the evidence of sexual harassment and violence, news reports largely constructed the suicides of Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons as "'bully-cides' (…) caused primarily by cyberbullying enabled by the girls' own risky behaviours" (Fyfe, 2014, p.48). In each of these cases, these girls were left not only to deal with the effects of being sexually assaulted and/or sexually exploited, but were also expected "to grapple with the humiliation of their assaults being shared repeatedly on social media networks and the resulting bullying and cyberbullying of peers who echoed sentiments that the girls were 'sluts' and therefore deserved this treatment" (Dodge, 2015, p.2).

Mathen (2014) suggests that online communication creates a reality where people "crowdsource" (p.529) others to further a campaign of sexual harassment. We already know that harassment by known peers is more likely to involve multiple perpetuators (Wolak et al, 2007), but in a digital forum this has extremely adverse effects. As one woman put it "I am not victimized one time. I am victimized every time someone types my name into the computer. The crime scene is right before everyone's eyes, played out again and again" (quoted in Mathen, 2014, p.531). The sexual assault and cyberbullying cases of Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons are regretfully only two of many; all bring up disturbing questions about the ways that sexual violence can be normalized and condoned within western society, and the role that technology plays in the perpetration of this violence.

In one study, half of the male teenage respondents reported having viewed a nude photo of a female classmate (Mathen, 2014); often, this occurs in the capacity of non-consensual dissemination. There are instances like Amanda Todd's, wherein the initially consented photo is

shared beyond her intended audience without her permission, and then there are cases like

Parsons', wherein the context of the photo itself was non-consensual. In 2013, the Canadian

government responded to these stories with the introduction of Bill C-13: the *Protecting*

Canadians from Online Crime Act. The Bill's focal point is a crime of distributing a person's

intimate images without their consent (Mathen, 2014). Dodge (2015) argues that "the online

dissemination of photographs of sexual assault not only extends the experience of the sexual

assault, but can be seen as an act of sexual violence in and of itself" (p.5), but indeed, any

photograph that compromises an individual's sexual autonomy, dignity, and privacy should be

regarded as such. There is arguably, according to Anastasia Powell (2010), a false distinction in

law, policy and academia between unauthorized sexual imagery as distinct from sexual violence;

one is seen as merely a distasteful violation of privacy, and the other a criminal violation of

bodily integrity. Reconsidering the definition of sexualized cyberbullying previously offered, I

draw attention specifically to its claim that these cases "also include criminal offences such as

unwanted sexual touching, assault, and rape" (Angrove, 2015, p.312) — like definitions are

clearly in use when the alleged sexual violence experienced by young women like Todd and

Parsons is described simply as "cyberbullying" (Fairbairn, 2015, p.241). Unwanted sexual

touching, assault, and rape are not cyberbullying, they are as indicated: criminal offences. The

World Health Organization defines sexual violence as "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual

act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a

person's sexuality using coercion by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in

any setting, including but not limited to home and work" (quoted in Fairbairn, 2015, p.232).

Bullying prevention is more palatable than sexual violence prevention to school and society in

general (Basile, Espelage, Rivers, McMahon & Simon, 2009), but the prevention strategies that

are effective for bullying are not necessarily appropriate or effective for sexual violence and

other forms of online violence.

Perspectives of Youth

When children and adolescents are asked what they think they would do if cyberbullied,

the most often suggested way of coping has been through different ways of technically protecting

oneself from harassment online. These technical solutions consist of blocking certain people

from contacting you online, changing passwords, user names, or email addresses, and deleting

anonymous text messages without reading them (Slonje et al., 2013). What is most troubling

about this data, is that while society points to schools, teachers, and administrators to be the

front-line force in addressing cyberbullying, youth themselves indicate that they are the *least*

likely source they will turn to. When asked who they would tell if they were subject to

cyberbullying, 74% of Canadian students said they would tell a friend, 57% said they would tell

a parent/guardian, and 47% would tell school staff. Within the sample, the willingness to tell

either school staff or a parent decreased with age, and although these percentages look fairly

encouraging, they fall dramatically when victims are asked what they actually did (Slonje et al.,

2013).

Consistent with parents' and teachers' own perceptions that they are not equipped to

address cyberbullying effectively, Robert Slonje, Peter Smith, and Ann Frisen (2013) report that

16% of cyberbullied respondents had sought help from parents and 9% from teachers. Likewise,

a 2011 study involving children aged 9-16 years old in 25 different countries found that: "77% of

the cybervictims had talked to someone about their experience; 52% told a friend, 13% told a

sibling, 42% talked to a parent, 8% to another adult they trust, and 7% told a teacher" (Slonje et

al., 2013, p.30). Youth who are cyberbullied are two times more likely to have attempted suicide

than other youth (Broll & Huey, 2014). The gravity of the digital world adolescents are

experiencing online demands that we reconsider what cyberbullying means socially, culturally,

and legally so that we can better address victims' needs and improve the efficacy of our

intervention and prevention strategies. Up to 90% of cyberbullying victims fail to report it to any

adult (Snakenborg et al., 2011), and so just as bullying has changed over the years, the strategies

we use to combat it must evolve as well.

Purpose of Research

Research and awareness surrounding cyberbullying in Canada has grown exponentially over the past decade, and yet we are still the ninth worst country at developing programming and supports to combat it (NSTF, 2012). I would argue that this is largely due, in part, to the inconsistent, convoluted, and ever-changing communication surrounding cyberbullying. To date, Canada has failed at solidifying an appropriate definition for cyberbullying to be used nationwide. This means that policy and procedures in one province are informed by one definition, while it can be entirely different in the rest of the country—in Nova Scotia's case, this has proven to be a major issue. It is hard for youth, their parents, teachers and school administrators, government and law officials, and scholars to develop, communicate, and build-upon anti-cyberbullying programming if we are not able to maintain an active definition and legislation for more than a few years. Further, un- or misinformed individuals—including educators—are unable to foster an understanding of appropriate online behaviour in youth if they are not clear on it themselves.

This exploratory qualitative study is important because it builds upon the theoretical and statistical groundwork set forth in cyberbullying research and legislation, while addressing the inherent gaps in social, cultural, and legal understandings of the phenomenon. Legal understandings of social phenomena must be far more definitive and concrete than our social and cultural circles demand, and while the literature to date has recognized and illustrated multiple layers and subcategories of "cyberbullying", none have gone so far as to try to redefine them in a legal context. In the physical social world, a non-consensual sexual act is not referred to as sexualized bullying, it is called assault or even rape; why is it not the same for digital acts of violence? I believe that violent actions that cross over into criminal offences should not be

lumped together with cyberbullying in our social and cultural understandings just because they

involve youth. They convolute legal understandings of cyberbullying and crime, and they

deserve their own distinct definitions, legislation, and attention if they are to be addressed

appropriately. As the police officers interviewed in Broll and Huey's (2014) study indicated, this

calls for specific consideration of what is cyberbullying, and what is inherently criminal activity.

Contemporary research has reached consensus that bullying involvement is highly

prevalent amongst today's youth, and currently affects up to one half of children and adolescents

worldwide (Bowes, Arseneault, Maughan, Taylor, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2009). In Canada, we have

placed tremendous onus on schools and teachers to be the front-runners in anti-cyberbullying

programing and education, but there seems to be a tendency for schools to adopt the same

methods used in traditional bullying incidents to combat cyberbullying. Evidence notes that

students do not perceive the same approach to be equally effective, and it is time for schools to

consider new alternatives to address cyberbullying. Students would benefit from school support

in helping them independently manage cyber abuse, and in order to do so effectively, "we must

first understand what interventions would be accepted by the general student population and

what responses would be considered as effective by bullies and victims themselves" (Paul,

Smith, & Blumberg, 2012, p.143). Ultimately, if organizations in Nova Scotia—be they the

school, family, government, or greater society—wish to successfully intervene in and prevent

cyberbullying, we must actively learn from history.

Timothy Sellnow and Matthew Seeger (2013) write that "organizational learning occurs

when organizations acquire feedback and apply this knowledge to make meaningful changes in

policy and procedures. Such learning is often based on observations derived from failures"

(p.77). I think that, just as the tragic deaths of Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons were learning

opportunities for Nova Scotian legal and educational systems, the debunking of the Cyber Safety

Act is second chance for these organizations to learn from failure and better prepare for the

future. Educators, scholars, and society have been analyzing the risk cyberbullying poses to

Canadian youth, but concerted efforts to learn from emergent crises has been misguided or

minimal. Emphasis on advancing technology and the way youth interact with it does not

necessarily lead to educating the public about its use or misuse (Cassidy et al, 2012).

Cyberbullying intervention requires the joint efforts of everyone who shares concerns about the

safety of children and youth. Making meaningful progress against the rising incidence of

cyberbullying will not occur through new laws alone, "but rather requires a concerted effort

across all sectors of society" (Stanbrook, 2014, p.483). Given the lack of one clear stakeholder

responsible for responding to cyberbullying, engaging multiple resources, and expanding the

effort beyond the school to local communities, families, and governments would communicate

the importance of addressing cyberbullying as unacceptable in any environment (Broll & Huey,

2014; Couvillon & Ilieva, 2011; Bowes et al., 2009).

A troubling 60% of Nova Scotian students identify as victims of cyberbullying (NSTF,

2012), and so it is time that teachers, law enforcement, parents, and communities truly dedicate

themselves to becoming part of the solution. Sellnow and Seeger (2013) suggest that: "if

organizations fail to learn from minor failures, they are far more likely to experience major crises

or face repeated crises (…) this failure to learn and maintaining a tendency to resist change, even

when faced with consistent failure, often persists until a crisis induces a shock to an organization

in the form of recalcitrance" (p.77). Based on previously discussed evidence, I would argue that

this is precisely what we have seen happen with cyberbullying in Nova Scotia's justice and

education system. Organizations that readily recognize failures and promptly attend to them are

less likely to experience crises (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013), and when the crises can be as tragic as

adolescent suicide, no response is fast enough. As Wayne MacKay, Chair of the Nova Scotia

Task Force (2012) has said, "the advance of technology and the prevalence of social media are

profoundly changing how we communicate, and in so doing, they are also changing who we are"

(p.1). While Canadian youth stand the most to gain from effective cyberbullying policy and

proactive measures, the positive impact of healthier, safer environments online for youth will

radiate out from their individual experiences to those of their families, communities, and

subsequent generations. If this can be achieved, the digital world Canadians experience and

foster will be far more inclusive, and substantially safer.

Methods

The wealth of literature on Canadian cyberbullying is quantitative in nature, and thus

problematic. As previously discussed, quantitative analysis of cyberbullying is skewed by the

inconsistent framing and understanding of cyberbullying itself— what one researcher considers

cyberbullying another may not. For this reason, this study takes an exploratory, qualitative

approach to conceptualizing cyberbullying through a detailed consideration of the recent history

and current status of the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act. With focused and strategic analysis of

existing legislation and research, as well as in-depth interviews with purposefully-selected youth,

parents, educators, law enforcement officers, and government professionals in Nova Scotia, I

reexamine the social and legal contexts in which cyberbullying takes place with the goal of better

conceptualizing cyberbullying in a way that will not only further illustrate the need for new

revitalized prevention and intervention strategies—including formal policy and legislation

regarding cyberbullying in Canada—but will extend beyond social, cultural, and academic

understandings to allow valuable insights and information for any such developments.

Methodology

This study employs feminist theory—specifically radical feminism— and the study of

semiotics as it was introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure (1994), Roland Barthes (1999), and

Stuart Hall (1980), under a symbolic interactionist lens. These frameworks were selected for the

diverse, detailed applications they offer to all areas of this study, including considerations of

gender, meaning, and victimization. Symbolic interactionism supports the hypothesis that social,

cultural, and legal conceptualizations of cyberbullying are interconnected, positing that "society

is possible because of shared meanings and social patterns created during social interactions"

(Bell, 2016, n.p.). Symbolic interactionism traditionally considers communication as an

important factor in the social development of individuals and posits that interaction is realized through symbols (Alver & Caglar, 2015, p.479). This focus on symbols lends to a natural partnership with semiotics that embodies the study of meaning and how it is instilled and received in our language, images, and communicative methods.

Feminism is an important consideration for this study, as previous research has noted the significant gender inequality in technological communication and the internet more broadly; in combination, semiotics affords a sophisticated understanding of "women's subordinate condition as cultural and not natural" (Godard, 2003, p.1). Kocaeli Alver and Sebnem Calgar (2015) illustrate that, "symbolic interactionism had a great role in making interactionism a prominent concept in communication studies" (p.482); in modern discussions, the nature of new technologies and media have changed that of interpersonal communication and creates new interpersonal communication habits— including cyberbullying— that warrant the valuable analysis made possible under symbolic interactionism.

In a recent study conducted by Rebecca Rafferty and Thomas Vander Ven (2013), it was suggested that as cyberbullying is a phenomenon that relies mainly on the use of language and symbols, as well as intensive interaction between individuals, symbolic interactionism provides "the most promising perspective from which to frame" (p.366) a study of cyberbullying perspectives. Symbolic interactionism studies that focus on the emergence and interpretation of meaning, as Alver and Calgar (2015) continue, "have a leading role in the analysis of interpersonal communication" (p.482); and so all further considerations within this study— including feminist theory and semiotics— will be understood under this assumption.

Feminism.

Feminist theories have long argued that women experience systematic inequality in a variety of forms, including sexual targeting, domestic violence, and sexual abuse; women are 11 times more likely to be victimized sexually than men (Angrove, 2015), and accordingly, sexual violence can be understood as an indication and practice of gender inequality between males and females. Liesbet van Zoonen (1996) presents three subcategories of feminism: liberal, radical, and social. With its overarching emphasis on patriarchy and inherent male dominance as organizational structures, radical feminism is evidenced by numerous researchers of sexualized cyberbullying. As van Zoonen (1996) explains, "radical feminists have been in the forefront of exposing male abuse of women and politicizing issues formerly considered as private: [including] sexual violence, wife battering, incest, pornography, and more recently, sex tourism and trafficking in women" (p.35). While feminists were optimistic at the onset of the internet— hoping it would provide a gender-neutral space for equality and opportunity— the internet is not especially known for its fair treatment and accessibility to all groups, and it remains gender-segregated and biased in many ways (Postmes & Spears, 2002). Though sexualized cyberbullying and the digital dissemination of sexually violent images may be a new concern for feminists, technology merely offers new ways for committing traditional crimes.

Jessica Ringrose and Katarina Barajas (2011) argue that, rather than challenging the gender norms, popular culture is now fetishsizing and celebrating idealized, binary versions of extreme gender norms and hypersexualized femininity for girls. Their online observations of the social networking site profiles of, and within, teenaged peer groups over a period of several months indicated that most girls are engaging in gendered and sexualized gossip, derogatory language, and bullying online. Girls are harassing other girls based on their appearances,

supposed lack of traditional and accepted femininity, relationships, and social status in ways that reinforce male power and dominance. Even in cases where sexual violence or harassment are implied, girls have the tendency to maximize this pain and abuse in their verbal attacks on other girls (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011).

Powell (2010) suggests that the underlying causes of sexual violence online, then, should not *only* be attributed to the technology itself, but rather are manifestations of gender inequality and societal attitudes that condone the mistreatment and sexual abuses of women. This sentiment is echoed by numerous scholars who explore the societal framework they call "Rape Culture"—the normalcy and legitimacy of sexual violence in everyday life (Dodge, 2015). Rape culture as a term targets the cultural practice that produce and justify sexual violence (Rentschler, 2014): not only does online sexual violence create victims, it creates a culture where sexual abuse and harassment is expected, tolerated, and even encouraged (Fairbairn, 2015). It is this normalization that "allowed many people, as well as some media outlets, to openly sympathize with the [attackers]" (Dodge, 2015, p.9), in cases like Amanda Todd's and Rehtaeh Parsons's. For this reason, it is important to explore and develop and understanding of how different meanings and ideas become normalized in society.

Semiotics.

Semiotics has become quite popular in feminist media criticism "because of its ability to unravel structures of meaning beyond the mere presence or absence of women in cultural forms" (van Zoonen, 1994, p.74), and in the case of cyberbullying and online sexual harassment—wherein images, "rape culture" language, and socially-derived meaning are prolific—it is an essential tool for understanding the social, cultural, and legal contexts. Hall (1980) proposed a transition model of encoding and decoding which encompasses semiotics; he suggests that we

view the transition of information from producer in terms of a structure produced and maintained

through linked, distinctive stages: production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and

reproduction. Production is the stage within which the message is constructed, but not without

the influence of semiotic codes and signs. Almost anything can be considered a sign, including

words and images, but it is up to the semiologist to determine how particular combinations of

signs construct meaning. Consisting of two major elements, the signifier and the signified, there

are six types of signs—symptom, signal, index, icon, symbol, and name— carrying with them

histories of associations and meanings (van Zoonen, 1994; Danesi, 1990). For Saussure (1989),

meanings of signs were determined and solidified by convention, and in some way, always elude

the individual or social will. Codes, on the other hand, are the systems of signs; Hall (1980)

emphasizes that "there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code" (p.95). Codes

include gestures, words, and essentially all other widely adopted influences and contexts.

According to Danesi (1999), underlying semiotic analysis are three general principles: that all

meaning-bearing behaviour and expression have historical origins, no matter how modern they

seem; that codes influence people's notions of what is "normal" human behaviour, and; that the

codes within which one grows up influence their worldviews and perceptions later. For this

reason, semioticians do not acknowledge any form of "absolute" meaning; rather, meaning can

be, and is, categorically separated into "denotative" or "connotative". While "denotative" is

widely equated with the true or literal meaning of a sign, and "connotative" is attributed to the

diverse, conventionalized, associative meanings that for Barthes (1999) are linked with culture,

knowledge, and history, Hall (1980) reminds us that these terms "are merely useful analytic tools

for distinguishing in particular contexts, between not the presence/absence of ideology in [signs],

but the different levels at which ideologies and discourses intersect" (p.97). With this basic

understanding of semiotics at hand, we can now explore the semiotic value of images

specifically, and begin to consider how it relates to sexually violent images and rape culture.

Rooted in Saussure's considerations of language, semiotics pays special consideration to

words as signs, but many have explored the notion of images as signs as well— most notoriously

being Roland Barthes. According to Barthes (1999), semiotic interpretations of photographs can

seem problematic, as they may appear to present themselves as messages without a code. Instead

of rules of transformation, photographs transmit information by recording. In this way,

considering our previously outlined six forms of signs, photographs are iconic— "a sign that

simulates, replicates, reproduces, imitates, or resembles properties of its referent in some way"

(Danesi, 1999, p.33). In her study of photographs and war crime, Judith Butler (2007) suggests

that it is important that we recognize the photograph as an interpretation in itself; they are

recording events that actually were, and so the photographs function as an incontestable

communication of information. As has been previously discussed in terms of sexualized

cyberbullying, photos have the capacity to recreate and extend the trauma of original sexual

assaults (Dodge, 2015). Rape culture acts as a code within which adolescents produce, share, and

consume sexually violent images— considering Hall's (1980) four stages of encoding and

decoding, rape culture begins in the production stage. Butler (2007) poses a serious question in

her consideration of war crimes when she asks how the "norms that govern which lives will be

regarded as human lives and which will not, enter into the frames through which discourse and

visual representation proceed?" (p.956). Sexual assault is unquestionably a way of

dehumanizing, degrading, and harming people in the same way that torture tactics during war do,

and so the same question is applicable. The torturer knows, claims Butler (2007), that taking

photos will further shame the victim—which brings us to Hall's (1980) circulation stage. Mathen

(2014) states that online communication creates a reality where one can "crowdsource" an audience to further a campaign of sexual violence, sexually violent images, and Powell (2010) agrees: images "would not be distributed if those responsible did not consider that there was a willing and ready audience for them, and if that initial audience did not consider that it would be okay to send the image on to others" (p.86). Iconic signs are coded signs—even if the codes work differently from those of other signs (Hall, 1980) — and the perceived everydayness of rape culture and sexual harassment/assault enable rape culture to thrive (Shariff & DeMartini, 2015). By being coded in rape culture during the production and circulation stages, sexually violent images affect the decoding process as well— proliferating rape culture through consumption and reproduction.

Pierre Bourdieu (1999) suggests that, of all the types of signs, iconic signs like photography establish a transcendent relationship between signifier and signified: "meaning being related to form without being completely involved in it. Photography, far from being perceived as signifying itself and nothing else, is always examined as a sign for something that it is not" (p.74). In the case of sexualized cyberbullying, that is true both from a legal standpoint, and the affect it has on persons involved. Researchers are arguing that the dissemination of images depicting true events of sexual abuse or violence are a continuation of the act, and an event of sexual violence in itself— thus the photo is signifying something far more serious than its physical form would suggest. Nevertheless, digital harassment and online sexual violence are often lumped under the umbrella-term "cyberbullying", yet they are two very different phenomena and need to be understood as such at the social and cultural levels, as well as legally.

Method of Analysis

This research includes a discourse analysis of documents pertaining to Nova Scotia's original Bill No.61, with particular consideration of the presentation of cyberbullying as a concept and definition; a semiological analysis of photos and media images surrounding cyberbullying in Nova Scotia, and; qualitative interviews with key stakeholder groups. Participants were selected through a purposive sample for law enforcement and government officers; and convenience sampling for students, parents, and teachers. In combination, feminism, semiotics, and symbolic interactionism inform all stages of this study by enabling considerations of gender, meaning, and victimization through the understanding that social, cultural, and legal conceptualizations of cyberbullying are interconnected through shared meanings, social patterns, and cultural norms in interpersonal communication and interaction.

Participant data was gathered largely through one-on-one or small-group interviews that were recorded and later transcribed, save for the student cohort, who participated in a closed focus-group setting in a Mount Saint Vincent University classroom, and the teacher cohort, which was conducted with a Mount Saint Vincent University Masters of Education class. There were 32 participants in total— 14 students, six parents, six teachers, and six representatives within law enforcement and government including two Government Enforcement Agents working within the Department of Justice in the CyberSCAN Unit, the Minister of Justice, and the Minister of Community Services. Other than the Minister of Justice, each participant was posed the same set of questions, with a select few questions tailored for each demographic. The Honourable Diana Whalen was instead asked to share any information she could on behalf of the Department of Justice regarding the previous Cyber Safety Act and the status of any current

efforts or amendments; for this reason, her responses will be omitted from the general data analysis, and presented individually.

It is important to note that this study uses an exploratory approach to understanding cyberbullying in Nova Scotia; themes and findings were developed through induction from the data, rather than deduction from the theories and methodologies employed in the study. To achieve this, simple open-ended questions that allowed participant insight to definitions and meanings were developed and employed, and any coding conducted during discourse and semiological analysis was open and used to develop themes. For a detailed view of the interview protocol, please see interview and focus group questions in Appendix A, and a complete listing of discourse analysis codes in Appendix B.

Process.

To conduct this study, I began with a close-reading and discourse analysis of the former Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013) and the Nova Scotia Task Force on Bullying and Cyberbullying's (2012) report which informed its creation. Nova Scotian cyberbullying prevention and intervention strategies have been centered on the legislation since its inception and repeal, and so a firm understanding of it and the documents that inspired it are integral to a functional understanding of how cyberbullying is understood socially and legally in Nova Scotia. Analysis of the documents was conducted through a feminist, semiotic lens, as were six images. The images featured in this study were pulled from an online image-search using the phrase "Nova Scotia cyberbullying". To avoid the influence of anticipatory algorithms based on search-engine histories, this sample was searched and pulled using a public library computer. It is possible that this search was still influenced by the computer's search histories, however, it was important that collection be conducted on a computer other than my own, which

is likely to have been skewed by my numerous search histories related to this research. I decided

that the most appropriate representation of any given Nova Scotian's search results for "Nova

Scotia cyberbullying" images would be those retrieved from a publicly owned and used

computer.

      The six images used in this study were selected if their source fell within one of two

categories— an established, organized mainstream media, or a source owned and operated by the

Nova Scotian government. The first four images from four distinct media sources were pulled,

and the first two from government sources were selected; of course, this sample could have been

larger, but a detailed semiological analysis of more than six images is beyond the scope of this

study, and the limitations of a single researcher with tight timelines. It was important that the

media images be from four distinct and separate entities to ensure that an organizational bias did

not skew image samples; often, mainstream media sources are owned by private entities that

influence the direction of their content, such as political leanings, personal interest, and so on.

Organizational bias is harder to avoid in government institutions, and so these two images were

selected for their top-placement within the image search.

      Before detailing my process for analyzing these text and image samples, I would like to

conclude my process for data collection. This study involved engaging research participants to

represent the perspectives of four key demographics affected by cyberbullying— youth, parents,

teachers, and law representatives and government officials. Youth, parents, and teachers were

solicited through convenience sampling within the Mount Saint Vincent University community.

Since sample size is not a significant factor for data validity in qualitative research, it was

decided that samples of 6-8 individuals for each of the four demographics in this study would

satisfy my need for a variety of perspectives while keeping the data manageable. While I

originally hoped that a general call-out to the Mount Saint Vincent University community would be more than enough to pull in six students, parents, and teachers, I was mistaken. Instead, I had to resort to direct solicitation. To avoid samples solely comprised of my own personal network, I reached out to faculty at the Mount explaining my research goals with the hope that they would offer up some of their class-time with students for me to conduct focus groups. I was able to secure a group of six teachers in the Master of Education program at the Mount— I chose the graduate program as I it was integral to this study that I speak to teachers with experience teaching in a classroom— and a class of 14 undergraduate students to represent the youth cohort. Youth and teachers participated in focus groups conducted during an hour of their regular class-time, and this proved to be a very effective format as participant discussion was enriched through interaction with each other. Six parents were enlisted for this study through convenience sampling within my personal and extended network, while the law and government representatives—which also included six individuals— were collected through purposive sampling. It was important that the law and government representatives in this study be purposefully sampled to better indicate the perceptions and knowledge of officials working directly in line with legal cyberbullying developments in Nova Scotia. Soliciting participants for the law and government cohort was much easier than I anticipated, largely due to keen interest in the research topic. Minister of Community Services, Joanne Bernard was contacted through her government office after I read a statement she gave in news article pertaining to her views and experiences with cyberbullying. From the onset, I wanted to engage with Minister of Justice, Diana Whalen, as her department is responsible for any current initiatives surrounding cyberbullying legislation in Nova Scotia; as a constituent in her riding, I easily arranged a phone-conversation with her through her office. From there, I emailed an agent from the CyberSCAN

Unit directly, who further enlisted the participation of their colleague, and also connected me with two individuals within their professional network who became the remaining two participants in the law/government cohort. Unlike the youth and teacher cohorts, parents and law enforcement/government officials participated in interviews individually or in pairs of two. The convenient benefit of soliciting youth and studying-teachers through their faculty at the Mount was that they already come together regularly; the same cannot be said about varying parents and professionals. Though I initially tried to set up focus group times for the parent and law/government cohorts, conflicting schedules of participants made it impossible, so I instead scheduled one-on-one/paired interviews at times and locations of their convenience.

To prepare for the focus groups and interviews, I crafted a set of generalized open-ended questions. Given the exploratory, qualitative nature of this study, I treated my open-ended questions as probes for discussion for participants, though did not participate in any form of discussion myself. Despite format or group-size, each cohort was posed the same list of research questions (Appendix A1) save for a few questions specifically for youth and a few specifically for the "adult" cohorts. It was important that participants across the four cohorts be asked the same set of questions, in the same manner, in the same order; this approach enabled seamless comparison of responses across demographic groups. The only research participant whom did not respond to the same list of questions was the Nova Scotia Minister of Justice, the Honourable Diana Whalen. Given the nature of Minister Whalen's position in government and the status of the cyberbullying legislation, she was unable to speak directly of her personal perceptions without inadvertently implying that they were the perceptions of the department. Minister Whalen instead was openly asked to voluntarily disclose any information she could regarding the former Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act, and any developments since its repeal. Given the

disconnect between Minister Whalen's participation and that of the other five individuals within

the law and government cohort, her responses were isolated from the analysis and as such are

presented separately from the other findings within this study.

Upon final collection of participant responses, all interviews and focus-group discussions

were transcribed from audio recording and fieldnotes with all personally identifying information

of participants were replaced with pseudonyms where necessary— some participants, chose to

identify only with their demographic, such as youth and parents; others gave professional titles,

and; both Minister Whalen and Minister Bernard gave permission to include their names and

titles in full. At this point, I began the process for data analysis and interpretation. As I noted

earlier, this is an exploratory study, and so codes and themes for discourse and semiological

analysis were inducted from the samples, meaning they were developed only on the basis of the

emerging information collected from participants. In the process of identifying codes within all

data samples— documents, images, and participant transcripts— hundreds of codes were noted,

however I do not discuss all of them. Inclusion of codes in discussion of the analysis was based

on whether these codes were part of broader themes prolific across or within samples. For

example, codes such as "sibling" and "elderly" only occurred once across all data samples, so

they did not warrant any great attention. The only concerted attention I paid to any one theme in

the identification of codes in the data was my eye for any feminist ideas or themes that presented

themselves; such as the presentation of females as examples of cyberbullying victims. In addition

to feminist codes and signifiers, I scanned all documents and participant responses for patterns of

learning or information sharing, contradictory statements or ideas, and largely common themes

or opposing ideas across demographic groups. To use the same example as above, this meant that

when participants offered female examples of cyberbullying victims, I also noted the sources

participants cited for learning their concepts of cyberbullying, such as mainstream media; the

frequency with which this female-victim descriptor was offered among participants, and; how

this aligned with, or contradicted, the perceptions of others both within and beyond their

demographic. Throughout the project I was careful to ensure that, while I paid attention to

feminism throughout the coding process, all codes and themes were identified through induction

rather than deduction, and nothing was attributed to the participants' responses that was not

overtly expressed within them. By using an open-coding approach, I allowed participants to

inform this research through their responses, instead of analyzing their responses against a pre-

established set of ideas. Coding was conducted manually instead of using a computer-based

program because it allowed more intimate involvement with content analysis. Content within

each individual demographic cohort was color-coded based on themes, according to the codes

that were assigned—such as the presentation female cyberbullying victims— then re-arranged

collectively per the questions posed to participants. Once segregated into application to research

questions, the content was organized by theme to better juxtapose responses and perspectives of

the participants and demographic cohorts: for example, when addressing the research question

pertaining to how cyberbullying is conceptualized, any responses that were coded with the

female-victim theme were grouped together to enable more effective analysis. Finally, when all

content— both secondary and primary— was coded and organized, the findings were presented

and discussed in relation to the core research questions in this study and the methodological

frameworks employed. For this step, it was important to include the perspectives of multiple

participants, as this supports the establishment of a theme, and adds to the validity of these

insights as overall findings.

Ethical Considerations

Recognizing that cyberbullying can be a sensitive and personal matter for many individuals, especially affected youth, several measures were taken to ensure participant safety and informed consent. Firstly, I decided to exclude the participation of children/youth under the age of 19 for this study. The youth demographic is comprised of 14 undergraduate students at Mount Saint Vincent University, 19 years of age or older; these individuals were secondary students at the time of the Cyber-Safety Act's installment in 2013, and have grown up with digital technologies and social media as a norm for daily use and communication, at the height of cyberbullying awareness in Nova Scotia. It is my further belief that with their age and experience as undergraduate students, this demographic may be better equipped to accurately articulate their thoughts and perceptions surrounding cyberbullying in a qualitative study compared to their younger peers.

Appropriateness of the Research Design

An exploratory qualitative study rooted in feminism, semiotics, and symbolic interactionism is appropriate for conceptualizing cyberbullying in Atlantic Canada because it offers the opportunity to examine the phenomenon through multiple lenses, without constraints of solidified definitions and measures. Since the definition of 'cyberbullying' is the very point of contention within current legislation and discussion in Nova Scotia, to attempt a quantitative study utilizing a fixed concept or definition would be a disservice to the progression of our social, cultural, and legal understandings, and the goal of this research.

While reliability and validity in qualitative research differ from those in quantitative studies, they are nevertheless important. Qualitative reliability indicates my approach is consistent, while qualitative validity means that the accuracy of findings is ensured by employing

certain procedures (Creswell, 2014). The reliability of this study was ensured through careful transcription of audio recordings of participants' responses, while employing a codebook to ensure I did not drift in my definition or application of codes throughout the data analysis. Validity in this study is achieved through the triangulation of data from my varying sources and using it to build the justification for themes; "if themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study" (Creswell, 2014 p.201). In addition, providing detailed descriptions and the perspectives of several participants for various themes enriches the validity of this study as well.

As the researcher, it is likely that my personal influence has had some form of influence on this study. It is true that, as van Zoonen (1994) suggests, one of the greatest flaws in semiotic analysis specifically, is the extent to which it depends on the researcher's knowledge of cultural codes. To mitigate this bias, it has been the goal of this study to incorporate not just semiological insights in cyberbullying, but contextual and historical ones as well, and the additional influence of feminism and symbolic interactionism. It is possible, however, that since Danesi (1999) and others confirm that the codes in which we grow up influence our worldview and perceptions, and that connotation is constrained by culture, the semiotic analysis of images in this study is appropriate only in a Canadian, if not specifically Nova Scotian female experience. I would argue that this does not diminish the value of this study however, as the value of an exploratory qualitative study is not in its generalization of findings to individuals or places outside of those participating in the study; "the value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and themes developed in context of a specific site" (Creswell, 2014, p.203-204).

Summary

For this exploratory qualitative research, there first took place an extensive literature review of existing policy and research surrounding cyberbullying in Nova Scotia as well as Canada more broadly. In addition, primary data collection consisted of semiological analysis of both written and audiovisual content pertaining to cyberbullying in Nova Scotia, and interviews with 32 participants representing four distinct stakeholder groups in cyberbullying— Nova Scotia law enforcement and government, students, parents, and teachers. These individuals were solicited through purposeful and convenience sampling and participated in one-on-one or small group interviews. Interview recordings were transcribed, and then coded and analyzed along with the discourse analysis of documents pertaining to the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act through the theoretical lenses of feminism, semiotics, and symbolic interactionism. Results and findings from this study are presented and explored in the following chapters.

Findings

By exploring definitions and conceptualizations of cyberbullying in social and legal

contexts, the goal of this research was to highlight how current prevention and intervention

strategies in Nova Scotia fail to account for the varying perspectives of all groups they affect. To

do this, I had to ask three core questions:

- How is cyberbullying conceptualized and understood socially, culturally, and legally

  in Nova Scotia?

- How did Bill No. 61 (the Cyber Safety Act) instituted in 2013 fail or succeed in its

  task, and what is the status of cyberbullying legislation in Nova Scotia?

- What changes or considerations need to occur in Nova Scotia to ensure that the goals

  and intent of our cyberbullying efforts are reflected in the creation and execution of

  our intervention and prevention strategies?

To answer these questions, I present below: a detailed analysis of the responses of 32 research

participants representing the perspectives of Nova Scotian youth, parents, teachers, law

enforcement, and government; followed by a discourse analysis of the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety

Act (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013) and the Nova Scotia Task Force on Bullying and

Cyberbullying report (NSTF, 2012) that informed it, and; a semiological analysis of prominent

images used in Nova Scotian cyberbullying messaging.

Participant Responses

While identities of the youth, parent, and teacher participants were kept confidential in

this study, the law enforcement and government participants were asked to share some degree of

identifying information. While two participants preferred to remain anonymous, two are

identified as "Government Enforcement Agents" within the Department of Justice's CyberSCAN

Unit, and the remaining two are publicly named as the Honourable Joanne Bernard, Minister of

Community Services in Nova Scotia, and the Honourable Diana Whalen, Minister of Justice in

Nova Scotia. An important note for this cohort is that they differ from the other cohorts in this

study since all participants were purposefully sampled and solicited for participation due to their

individual declared direct experience with cyberbullying in Nova Scotia from a professional

capacity.

        Conceptualizations of cyberbullying.

        This study posits that conceptions of cyberbullying in Nova Scotia are variant and

convoluted, and that they differ between the youth, parents, teachers, and law enforcement and

government officials the phenomenon affects. Though the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act was

struck down in its entirety, the Supreme Court's greatest contention with the Bill was with its

definition of cyberbullying, as they determined it was too broad. After engaging with my

research participants, I maintain that one of our province's greatest detriments to combatting

cyberbullying is the absence of an established, effective definition and conceptualization. Based

on the findings within this study, I will argue that the repeal of the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act

was one of the first publicly visible manifestations of this failing.

        When asked about what characteristics and behaviours they believed helped define

cyberbullying, there was little consistency across the board of stakeholders in this study.

Students' most popular concept was something that entailed "a lack of consent" with nearly half

of students indicating that it is something linked to "photos online". Among adults, including

parents and government/law enforcement, "intentional" was the most prolific characteristic—

found among the clear majority of the participants in their demographics. In addition, thoughts of

anonymity and bullies feeling braver or emboldened online were popular among adults. While

only a few parents suggested that cyberbullying is being victimized online "by a stranger", many

participants across the adult cohorts maintained that working behind screen of a computer or

phone emboldens people to act in ways they otherwise wouldn't in face-to-face interactions. One

parent stated that "bullying as a term is perceived as something only between kids. Adults rarely

consider themselves bullies, they say that they are just expressing their opinions"; likewise,

members of the other cohorts, echoed this sentiment. Interestingly, several students made

comments in a similar vein as "just expressing opinions" when discussing youth activity online.

For some, interpersonal disputes among friends that take place online is "drama". One of these

participants noted that "if there is back-and-forth name-calling or drama between people on my

Facebook feed, I don't really think of it as cyberbullying… it is just entertaining" to which

several students laughed in agreement.

Of the total 32 research participants, 28 identified youth as the most at risk for being

cyberbullied. Found across all four stakeholder groups was a sentiment that anyone who is

already marginalized in some way is at greater risk of violence online: one parent said that those

at most risk is "anyone who won't conform… anyone who is perceived as different or lacking",

while a student replied that "people, at any age, who are different from what is considered

socially acceptable" are most at risk. Three participants— all from the law and government

cohort— indicated that they perceive females to be at greater disadvantage than males online.

Comments were made among several participants in this study that suggested that

females are victimized online more frequently than males. One of the Government Enforcement

Agents within the CyberSCAN Unit noted that "while we have been getting more calls recently

from males being targeted by sexual predators, females are victims moreso than males". One of

the teachers in this research offered an example when the group was asked if cyberbullying was a

major issue: the story she shared was of a young girl who was raped at a party and was "cyberbullied because of a photo and is still suffering emotionally from it". Focused attention to the sexual element within these two statements is of special importance, beyond the inherent gendered inequality, because of the implications it holds from a legal standpoint. The sexual victimization or exploitation within these examples are criminal offences of their own right, but the social understanding of them as being "cyberbullying" implies a normalization of the behaviour—and with normalization there often comes proliferation.

Regardless of nature or concept, all 32 participants in this study expressed that they believe that cyberbullying is a major issue, and of utmost concern for Nova Scotia. Within the law and government cohort, three participants—including the two Government Enforcement Agents within the CyberSCAN Unit— indicated that they have in past, or are currently receiving cyberbullying complaint calls daily. One of the participants within the teacher cohort was quoted for stating that "cyberbullying is an increasingly major issue. Students are constantly involved in their phones, and like a wildfire it spreads immediately"; while all of the other teachers in the cohort agreed with the statement, one even said that they were so exasperated with the issue they wished they could remove the technology from their students' reach altogether because of the negative behaviours "the technology encourages". One parent shared anxieties similar to others regarding the extensive reach and prolific nature of cyberbullying in their comment that, "there is no escape from cyberbullying. We typically think of home as somewhere that we are safe, but with cyberbullying it is one of the places you are most likely to be exposed… Home is not safe anymore".

When participants were asked how they learned their personal concepts of cyberbullying, few could provide specific sources. Most respondents instead indicated that they had either

acquired their concept over the years through experience, or had encountered it through the

media. Youth especially noted that the media plays a large role in their learning, with half

attributing their concepts to social media, mainstream media or news sources, and several more

naming "movies" as their source explicitly. Mainstream media was also a significant information

source half of the law enforcement and government cohort: "you just have to turn on the news

and there is always some kind of story about someone being harmed by cyberbullying," one

participant remarked. Similar statements were made within the parent cohort; however, four of

the six parents indicated that they have never encountered a formal or "set" definition of

cyberbullying.

      Finally, when asked if there were any forms of negative behaviour or activity online that

participants decidedly did not consider cyberbullying, the majority said no. One teacher indicated

that anything of a sexual nature crossed a line from cyberbullying for them, while some parents

suggested that the term "cyberbullying" is used too broadly, and that there are indeed many

behaviours online that shouldn't be considered "cyberbullying". One student provided the

example of internet "memes"— digitally based images accompanied with text that are typically

thought of as being humorous, which is copied and spread rapidly across the internet—as

something that is perhaps outside of the purview of cyberbullying, and several students nodded

in agreement. However, the initial participant went on to say that perhaps memes should still be

considered cyberbullying since "the faces behind the memes probably didn't give consent for

their photo to be shared so publicly and given such outrageous or false contexts". Many students

(five respondents) and two participants in the law enforcement cohort, however, maintained that

"if intent is there, it is all cyberbullying".

Considerations of Nova Scotian policy and legislation.

An important consideration in any discussion of cyberbullying is whether people are aware of available resources and supports— prevention and intervention strategies are moot if key persons affected and the general public are not aware that they exist. When asked what supports are available for persons affected by cyberbullying, the most common answer among respondents in this study was a phone-based "help line". While there was some disparity as to whether participants were referring to the national 'Kids' Help Line', or the Nova Scotian CyberSCAN Unit's phone-based support, it is important to note that the majority of respondents (approximately 70%) were aware that some form of help line existed. Other popular answers were the IWK Children's Hospital and school guidance counsellors.

Despite its media coverage both at the time of its creation and of its repeal, there was little awareness or specific knowledge of the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act across demographic groups. When asked what they knew about current or recent efforts surrounding cyberbullying in Nova Scotia, students were most familiar with "Pink Shirt Day"— a bullying awareness day hosted annually within schools that was founded by two Nova Scotia senior-high boys showing support for a younger student. Parents, on the other hand, were more familiar with "Rehtaeh Parsons". When asked for clarification by what they meant when they said "Rehtaeh Parsons", parents knew few details beyond her name and that she was involved in some form of cyberbullying case with intimate/sexually violent images. The two participants in the law and government cohort that identified as Government Enforcement Agents worked directly under the old legislation, and while their awareness was unsurprisingly vast, it was greatly contrasted by the other two law enforcement individuals who said they knew it had existed, but didn't know any other details beyond that: to quote one of these participants— "To be honest, I genuinely still

don't know anything specific about cyberbullying laws". Similar to the statistics found in the

parent and youth cohorts, nearly three quarters (67%) of teachers didn't have a working

knowledge of any cyberbullying specific efforts in Nova Scotia, save for one who stated that

they had been using the Nova Scotian legislation "as a teaching tool in my classroom and found

it helpful to show students that there were consequences to their actions. I panicked when it was

repealed because having it made me feel more comfortable talking about cyberbullying with my

students".

Participants were asked where they would go to learn more about cyberbullying, and the

unanimous response was "online", while in some cases more specifically, "Google". In addition

to turning to an internet-based search, two respondents subsequently said they would turn to the

police— the only alternative offered by any of the study's participants. In the case of several

students, the response of online was preceded by "I have no idea". In a question tailored

specifically to youth, I asked the student cohort the following: "how would you respond if

someone you are close to became engaged in cyberbullying; either as a victim or as a bully?"

The most prolific theme among respondents' answers was a tendency to take the matter into their

own hands, either by helping the victim block the bully online; taking it upon themselves to

"reprimand the bully", or; "offering the victim on advice for seeking punishment". As is evident

in those responses, students are largely unaware of external resources for bully victims; and even

if they are aware, they claim they would sooner step in themselves than get others involved.

Likewise, the question, "who should someone being cyberbullied turn to for help?" garnered a

top response of "peers" from 57% of student participants, with a phone-based help line— the

only concrete resource students named in the previously discussed question— being the least

popular recommendation among students. However, as I will make evident in the impending

presentation of additional findings, students contradict themselves in what they think they should do, and the actions they are most likely to take.

Perspectives on effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Based on global statistics and recent legislative developments, Nova Scotia—and Canada nationally— is failing in its cyberbullying prevention and intervention strategies. One of our failings is the vital consideration of the perspectives of key stakeholders in what they believe would serve as appropriate and meaningful tactics to combat cyberbullying. In this study, one of the first questions of this nature participants addressed was "who should be responsible for intervening in cyberbullying?" Parents were the number-one answer from 11 of the 14 student participants; 10 also indicated "police", and six participants said that friends/peers should be responsible for intervening. The last entity students named for responsibility in cyberbullying was the school/teachers, which was the least supported suggestion (only identified by three participants). As was previously illustrated, this is a stark contrast to the responses students gave in similar questions, when they said that the group victims should turn to are their peers, and perhaps teachers. Similarly, "parents" was among the top answers of law enforcement: "Everyone should be involved, it shouldn't just be dumped on police. Parents and teachers need to play a role too". When I investigated the perspectives of teachers and parents themselves, however, I found that 50% of teachers feel law enforcement are the primary group that should be responsible for intervening in cyberbullying. Likewise, while parents recognize they should play a role, they are hesitant to: "cyberbullying intervention should start and end at home, but a lot of parents just aren't prepared to do that," and perhaps "parents should step in, but in some cases parents might be part of the issue". Upon noting hesitancies and potential problems with getting involved themselves, most parents then indicated that law enforcement should be the primary

entity responsible for intervening in cyberbullying: "I would turn to police or the school," stated

one parent, "but turning to the school could make things worse for your kid. In my experience

kids don't want you going to their school or teachers about these things". Of the parent cohort,

only one participant said explicitly that they would expect the school to play a major intervention

role.

Further contradicting themselves, the majority of students in this study went on to say

that, despite noting parents and police as the main entities that should be responsible for

intervening in cyberbullying, 11 of the 14 students were unconfident in adults' ability to

effectively intervene— four respondents were unsure, while seven were adamant that adults are

not prepared or able. One student commented that "teachers may be [prepared or able], but

probably not parents. Cops may be as well, but they would need to be willing to patrol the web

and they'd need to actually know that cyberbullying exists". Another common sentiment was

that parents are not impartial enough to be able to get involved effectively: "Parents get too upset

and don't believe their kids are actually bullying," and parents are "biased and overemotional,

and sometimes they can't do anything anyway because the problem is too far gone on social

media.

Echoing the students' concerns, parents, law enforcement, and teachers themselves also

indicated that they do not feel prepared to intervene in cyberbullying should they encounter it.

One teacher noted that, "schools are being held accountable, but we are not really prepared to

address the problem, and the issue is just going to keep getting bigger with the advancement of

technology". Across these three "adult" cohorts, only three individuals had any form of

cyberbullying-specific training or guidance, and these were from within the law enforcement

cohort, including the two CyberSCAN officials. All teacher and parent participants in this

research indicated that they had never been given any form of formal guidance or training and this corresponded to their confidence in intervening in cyberbullying. Among parents, half said they were prepared to intervene, but their reasoning reflected confidence in their own parenting skills and children; of the other half, the resounding sentiment was that "there isn't a lot of formal information available. I've never received specific guidance," with another parent commenting that they are "afraid of the tech world. It is hard to monitor and I have never been given any kind of help or training to understand it". All six teacher respondents were unanimous in that they too did not feel prepared to act against cyberbullying— "teachers feel overwhelmed, and we are not given the tools and help to deal with it"; "there is not enough info and there's even less training". One teacher noted her frustration with technology and the others agreed, noting that they feel that even if they had some form of cyberbullying training, it is "just too hard to change the behaviours".

The question then becomes who and what is the best approach for preventing and intervening in cyberbullying in Nova Scotia? Minister of Community Services, the Honourable Joanne Bernard encapsulated the sentiments of several other participants in this study when she said, "addressing cyberbullying needs to be a collective effort— no one entity owns this"; but alternatively as one teacher noted, many participants feel that "everyone seems to be waiting on someone else to take charge". According to the collective responses of participants in this study, the answer seems to be education and awareness programming. Students say that there needs to be more general education and awareness raising, as well as "supports for bullies, not just punishments". Despite their earlier expressed desire to take action against cyberbullying themselves should someone close to them be affected, many retracted that sentiment later and said that "it might get worse if I get involved", and "they may not trust me in the future if I did

something on their behalf and they were confronted". All participants in the parent and teacher

cohorts echoed these sentiments in naming education and information sharing for students,

parents, teachers, and communities as important next-steps for our efforts in combatting

cyberbullying: "province-wide concise education is needed, with built-in programming; not just

one-off presentations," says one parent, "cyberbullying and online safety need to be taught in

schools, just like sex-ed. It needs to be in the curriculum". Another parent stated that we "need to

educate the leaders in our communities with holistic education, not just our kids". Minister

Joanne Bernard indicated she holds a similar sentiment when she stated that as a community and

government leader, she sees peers receiving social media training, but never any training that is

cyberbullying or online safety specific. However, the law enforcement and government cohort in

this study are ultimately of two minds. The Government Enforcement Agents within the Justice

Department's CyberSCAN Unit are currently taking preventative measures through education,

and they note the importance of this. However, two other participants in same demographic

cohort suggested that "education isn't working for prevention". A suggestion from one of the law

enforcement participants that indicated they are skeptical of educational tactics was a

cyberbullying "no contact order or peace bond"; this held greater significance for questions of

Nova Scotian development awareness since the previous cyberbullying legislation established

such an item.

　　　　Overall, participants in the study presented disparate conceptualizations of cyberbullying

and loose awareness of existing supports and initiatives, but relatively consistent views on what

needs to happen next for Nova Scotian developments in cyberbullying prevention and

intervention tactics. Therefore, I think it important to engage in a discourse and semiological

analysis of the direct messages Nova Scotians receive surrounding cyberbullying in order to

understand how the responses of this study's participants correlate to the theoretical frameworks I proposed. Conducting the discourse and semiological analysis of the former Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013), the Nova Scotia Task Force's (2012) report, and images surrounding cyberbullying messaging in Nova Scotia prior to engaging participants in direct discussion enabled me to better acquaint myself with the material that I knew some participants— primarily select individuals within the law enforcement and government cohort— would be inclined to discuss. However, having created the interview protocol and question list prior to engaging in that content allowed me to ensure that the questions I asked research participants were not leading or biased. A core effort of this study is to highlight any inherent disconnect between Nova Scotian cyberbullying law and messaging, and the perspectives and perceptions of the various affected demographics; and so, I believe it is important to explore these two areas individually before engaging in a cross-analysis.

Discourse and Semiological Analysis

As has been previously detailed, this study employs feminist theory and the study of semiotics under a symbolic interactionist lens. Feminist theory and semiotics are particularly useful in considerations of gender, meaning, and victimization in written and visual content as they enable us to understand how meaning is created, shared, and embedded in our society. In conducting discourse analysis and semiological readings of both written documents and visual images for this research, a set of predefined analysis codes were applied to each item. While the complete list of analysis codes can be found in Appendix A2, the following were some of the core considerations:

1. Feminist morals/ideas such as gender equality/inequality and roles

2. Differing behavioural/action categories in definitions (ie. sexual, aggressive, physical violence, emotional violence, name-calling, etc.)

3. Patterns of learning and transmission of information between and beyond stakeholder groups

While general findings from the semiological analysis is presented in this chapter, it is important to note that further details into its significance will be explored in a subsequent discussion chapter.

Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act and relevant documents.

In a symbolic interactionist lens, a close reading of the Nova Scotian Cyber Safety Act, formally known as Bill No.61 (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013)— An Act to Address and Prevent Cyberbullying— did not provide nearly the significant insights as did the document that informed its creation. In February of 2012, the Nova Scotia Task Force on Bullying and Cyberbullying published their report, Respectful and Responsible Relationships: There's No App for That. In this document they outlined their work and findings as a Task Force, and provided the government with several core recommendations that then helped form the foundation of the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act. Upon reading this document (NSTF, 2012), one of the most prolific themes I noticed was the presentation as female cyberbullying victims as examples, such as:

"mother of Jenna, whose talented young life ended in suicide" (p.4)

"the father of another young Nova Scotia woman" (p.4)

"a young woman who presented to the Task Force" (p.11)

"that someone, usually a female" (p.14)

"the gang rape of a young girl" (p.15)

"Pam Murchison, who lost her daughter" (p.25)

This lends not only to the notion that females are victimized more often online, but also lends to

the consideration that gender is an inherent factor in Nova Scotian understandings of

cyberbullying. In many instances, there was also a sexual element to the report's examples and

discussions, such as an overview of "sexting"; discussion of the intimate imagery scandal in

Sydney, Cape Breton in 2011 that involved more than 100 students as young as 13 years old

sharing intimate photos of themselves and others; and the detailed overview of the victimization

and gang-rape of a young British Columbian woman (NSTF, 2012). When looking for instances

of male examples in the document, the only occurrence I could find was the sanctioning of a

teacher for his out of class anti-Semitic comments (NSTF, 2012)— there were no explicit

examples of male cyberbullying victims.

In considering behavioural or action categories in definitions of cyberbullying, the Task

Force's (2012) definition, and the context their report provided around its creation, is integral to

this study. In a section titled "Differing Views" (p.40), the Task Force notes that, "the defining of

bullying and cyberbullying sparked considerable debate and discussion among members of the

Working Group and Task Force" (p.40). The tinge of irony that follows was the comment that

"from a legal point of view, if the legal definition includes too many elements (each of which

must be proven) it can make establishing a violation very difficult" (p.40)— the very core of the

court case against the definition that saw the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety act debunked. The

definition that the report (NSTF, 2012) recommended for bullying and cyberbullying was:

> Bullying is typically a repeated behaviour that is intended to cause, or should be known
>
> to cause, fear, intimidation, humiliation, distress or other forms of harm to another
>
> person's body, feelings, self-esteem, reputation or property. Bullying can be direct or

indirect, and can take place by written, verbal, physical or electronic means, or any other

form of expression. Cyberbullying (also referred to as electronic bullying) is a form of

bullying and occurs through the use of technology. This can include the use of a

computer or other electronic devices, using social networks, text messaging, instant

messaging, websites, e-mail, or other electronic means. A person participates in bullying

if he or she directly carries out the behaviour or assists or encourages the behaviour in

any way. (p.42-43)

Alternatively, the resultant Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013)

declared that:

"cyberbullying" means any electronic communication through the use of technology

including, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, computers, other electronic

devices, social networks, text messaging, instant messaging, websites and electronic mail,

typically repeated or with continuing effect, that is intended or ought reasonably be

expected to cause fear, intimidation, humiliation, distress or other damage or harm to

another person's health, emotional well-being, self-esteem or reputation, and includes

assisting or encouraging such communication in any way. (p.1)

While reworded slightly, the essence of the Act's definition of cyberbullying derives from that

provided through the Task Force's report. Both definitions suggest that cyberbullying is

something intended, or reasonably expected, to cause "fear, intimidation, humiliation, distress or

other" (NSTF, 2012 p.42-43; Government of Nova Scotia, 2013, p.1) form of harm. Since these

definitions are so similar, it is of additional importance to note the commentary on page 41 of the

Task Force report (2012), which states that: "another critical question is whose perspective is

adopted for purposes of the definition". For the above definition, the Task Force reports

considering the perspective "of the reasonable victim (…) [and] the reasonable perpetrator" (p.41). A detailed cross-comparison of the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act's above definition, and the perspectives of my research participants will be explored in the subsequent discussion chapter.

Considering the earlier-mentioned comments made by two participants in the law enforcement and government cohort who mentioned they would like to see some form of cyberbullying "no contact order" or "peace bond" in place in future, we must recognize that such a thing existed in the old Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act. Under the now debunked legislation, an individual or an investigator within the CyberSCAN Unit could apply for a Cyberbullying Prevention Order through the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, which would be valid for one year. The judge would decide the conditions on the Prevention Order, but they could include a ban or limit on a person from contacting the victim; a condition and deadline to remove a derogatory comment or post, or; limit the cyberbullies' use of technology (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013). It is understandable that the one law enforcement participant suggested a peace bond in future, because they were not aware of the details of the previous legislation, so this example in turn also lends to the idea that better education and information sharing is needed. In addition, it is also worth mentioning that parental involvement was integral to any case taken through the court process in the former legislation, as well the CyberSCAN Agents had noted that "with youth, it was also key to have parents and schools involved". These will prove valuable considerations in later discussions of best practices in prevention and intervention programming moving forward.

The final point I draw attention to in the discourse analysis of the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013) and the Nova Scotia Task Force on Bullying and

Cyberbullying (2012) report, is the noted influence of media and the law on moderating

information and behaviours— particularly in the latter document. In the preface of the report,

Chair of the Task Force, Wayne MacKay stated: "the advance of technology and the prevalence

of social media are profoundly changing how we communicate, and in doing, they are also

changing who we are" (p.1). For later discussions of how information is gathered, learned, and

shared— specifically, concepts of symbolic interactionism— it was also important to scan the

documents for sources and learning processes. Knowing that the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act

was informed by the Task Force, I analysed the latter document and found that the Task Force

worked alongside a Working Group, and was informed by youth focus groups and community

members; specifically, their process included:

- Five Task Force members: A scholar, two members of varying departments/levels of

  government, a parent representative, a student representative, and an additional member.

- Nova Scotia School Board Associations, Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, and Home and

  School Associations.

- Several Departments in the Nova Scotian Government, including Health and Wellness,

  Justice, and Community Services.

- Various levels of law enforcement including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and

  regional Police.

- Organizations including PREVNet and the IWK Healthy Foundation.

- A survey with approximately 5000 responses (60% youth); focus groups; and open

  meetings with the public.

This is not the exhaustive list of organizations and individuals that helped to inform the Task

Force's report (2012); however, it is enough to illustrate the depth of their data collection, and its

similarities to that of this research. Of importance to this study is the recognition that the

information sharing and gathering for the Task Force is layered with the contributions of various

social and legal perspectives. However, the report (NSTF, 2012) presents contradictory

statements that bring to question what role specifically these perspectives had the opportunity to

play. First the report (NSTF, 2012) declares that "our laws should reflect our core values and

principles and indicate what we stand for as a society" (p.48), and, then two sentences later, "one

of the important roles of law in society is to change attitudes and values about what is

inappropriate and blameworthy conduct. The role of law in changing views…" (p.48). From a

semiological perspective these statements are meaningful to this research as they call into

question the perceived embedding and decoding of information between the social, cultural, and

legal spheres; in addition, the contradiction further illustrates the influence of shared meanings

and social patterns created through social interactions on our social and legal understandings.

Nova Scotia cyberbullying digital imagery.

Marcel Danesi (1999a) claims that "the package's context of occurrence (…) determines

the kind of meaning you will extract from it" (p.29), so I wanted to consider what images are

used for cyberbullying, and what happens to them when they are placed in various contexts as an

integral component of this study. Judith Butler (2007) maintains that photos are not only shown,

they are named—both in the way they are presented and in the way they are framed— the words

that are used to describe what is shown work together with the iconic signs in the image illustrate

that the perspective (…) is so widely shared that we see the image as both reiterating and

confirming cultural norms. In his presentation of encoding and decoding, Hall (1980) argues that

there are three possible positions from which decodings can take place: dominant-hegemonic,

negotiated, and oppositional. A dominant-hegemonic position is the one that most enables the

proliferation of gender inequality and sexualization in images, as it entails decoding in terms of

the codes with which an image was encoded/produced, making the model symmetrical. A

negotiated position allows for consumers to accept the dominant coding, while also allowing

their own logic to influence their reading; lastly, the more radical oppositional position involves

recognizing the signs are inflected with dominant codes and subsequently denying them and

reproducing the decoded information with one's own frame of reference (Hall, 1980; Corner,

1980). I would argue that based on the samples pulled for this study, the majority of

cyberbullying images centric to Nova Scotian messaging inspire dominant-hegemonic positions

in decoding, while perhaps in rare cases, a negotiated position.

       In "Rhetoric of the Image", Roland Barthes (1999) names the ad as the most intentional,

evident form of signification in imagery. For advertising, there "is no purely denotative and

certainly no natural representation" (Hall, 1980, p.97); however, signification is very finely tuned

and developed in advertising, making it what van Zoonen (1994) notes as:

> the most popular object for semiotic analysis. As a concentrated form of communication,
>
> advertising needs to present its message in an extremely short time span, and depends
>
> heavily on the successful exploitation of the connotative power of signs (…) for the target
>
> group to recognize immediately what is being expressed, it is necessary that advertising
>
> draws from relatively common cultural symbols and meanings. (p.79)

Cyberbullying has two dominant digital visual treatments in Nova Scotia— that of the media,

and that of the government. To take a simple sample of images used by these entities, a simple

online Google image search on a public computer was conducted using the phrase,

"Cyberbullying Nova Scotia". This search retrieved thousands of images, but to make sure that

this research only analyzes samples that have higher visibility, images were pulled from the first

page only. An extensive semiological analysis of all imagery around cyberbullying in Nova

Scotia is beyond the scope of this research, so I decided that a sample from four distinct

organized media sources, and two government sources would serve this research, all of which

can be found in Appendix B2. The first media image samples came from Global News (Image

1), CBC News (Image 2), Huffington Post Canada (Image 3) and Maclean's (Image 4); the

government sources were the Government of Nova Scotia's antibullying website (Image 5), and

a scanned copy of the CyberSCAN informational brochure (Image 6). These media sources and

their respective images were selected because of their prominence in Nova Scotian and Canadian

mainstream media. Global News and CBC News are two of the top three news channels

accessible to Canadians; they have local, regional, and national coverage, as well as televised

and web-based mediums with social media presence as well. In turn, the Huffington Post has a

digital population of 79 million unique visitors each month (AOL, 2017), and Maclean's (2017)

engages 2.4 million readers weekly— the majority of which are Canadians. With enormous

readerships, multiple mediums and/or channels, and firmly established web-presences, these

mainstream media sources were chosen for their likely influence on Nova Scotian society. The

same reasoning was behind selecting the two government sources in this sample— the

Government of Nova Scotia's antibullying website and the CyberSCAN Unit's brochure. The

Government of Nova Scotia's antibullying website is intended to be the province's one-stop

information hub for all things bullying and cyberbullying, while the CyberSCAN Unit is tasked

specifically with educating the province on cyberbullying. These entities combined are intended

to offer a representation of the most prominent cyberbullying messaging Nova Scotians are most

likely to encounter.

I will direct attention first to the imagery and visual components of these pictures, as it is important to understand the ways these images are meant to represent the cyberbullying that one may find in "real" life. The first important observation to make about these images is that they all are images centered on females. Several of the images— mainly save for the image of the Rehtaeh Parsons march featured in Maclean's (Image 5)— not only feature females, but hyper-feminized images of them. Throughout the photos we see bright pink clothing, painted fingernails, jewelry, long hair, and the heightened display of emotion, which is traditionally linked to female gender stereotypes. In three of the images, young girls are clearly depicted alone, with their attention pointed to electronic devices— in one case a tablet, and in the other two a computer. Likewise, it is reasonable to assume that the girl featured in the CyberSCAN brochure (Image 6) is alone; however the image is significantly cropped. The girls' solitude in the photos suggest that cyberbullying is an isolating experience, and one that is often happening beyond the notice of adults. One young girl is situated in an empty classroom (Image 1), while the other two (Image 2 and Image 3) appear to be at home. The stuffed dog in the bottom right-hand corner of Image 2 emphasizes the physical characteristics of the girls that suggest they are young adolescents.

The colours and atmosphere of the image Huffington Post Canada (Image 3) featured is a stark contrast to the rest of the sample. While Images 1 and 2 show the young girls alone, but in brightly-lit, "every-day" contexts, Image 3 is so dark it is nearly colourless. The dark lighting suggests danger, secrecy, shame, vulnerability, and pain while also shielding some of the identifying features of the girl, suggesting that she could be "anybody". In further contrast to Image 1 and Image 2, the CyberSCAN brochure image (Image 6) is heavily cropped, as was noted earlier, which serves a similar depersonalizing feature as the colouring in Image 3. It is

important to note that the CyberSCAN brochure contains another photo— a similarly cropped image of a partial electronic keyboard and hand. Similar to the Huffington Post Canada image (image 6), and its accompanying image in the CyberSCAN brochure, there is a dehumanizing element to this image. In some respects, dehumanizing an image in this context can imply the idea that "everyone is victim", however it is also likely to diminish any empathy evoked by an image that displays the subject's face and/or emotional responses. The final note I would make about the second photo is that in its ambiguity, it is gender neutral, whereas the second photo is decidedly not. The girl in this photo is wearing bright pink clothing, pink nail polish, and a sparkly ring on her left hand. The focal point of the image is her hands, which are holding a cellphone, however much of the remainder of this image is bare skin— her arms and legs. Bare skin suggests vulnerability, and sexuality, especially when applied to the female gender. As has been previously noted, Nova Scotia really took notice of cyberbullying after the cases of Rehtaeh Parsons and Amanda Todd. I would argue that since these media and online sources are dated after these cases, the depiction of females at the center of cyberbullying can be interpreted as a semiological code that is embedded and decoded to form and proliferate our understandings of cyberbullying and who it involves/affects. Given the sexual nature of images involved in the experience and cases of Rehtaeh Parsons and Amanda Todd, it does raise the question of how sexualized victimization may play a role in these images as well.

The use of an internet-based image search for the collection of these images results in most being stripped of any linguistic messages— and thus any denotational and connotational values the linguistic messages may have provided; this has been the case for all in this sample, save for three. The first image with a linguistic message is the Global News (Image 1) depiction of the young girl in an empty classroom with her tablet. The only linguistic element of the whole

image is the Global News logo; however, this is still an important feature. The logo helps to frame the image in a news/media context which suggests a story or point of interest for the viewer. The CyberSCAN Brochure image is accompanied by a significant amount of text, which naturally boasts an anti-cyberbullying rhetoric. Not only are the linguistic messages in this ad in an English language code, but they act as what Barthes (1999) referred to as anchorage. Anchorage directs the reader through the various possible signifieds of the image, and causes them to avoid some and receive others; the linguistic messages of this brochure immediately negate the coded sexual vulnerability framework we could infer from the image on its own. The final image with a linguistic message is the CBC News image (Image 2); in this photo, we have a clear view of the young girl's computer screen which reads "I CAN RUIN UR LIFE NO 1 LIKES YOU! LOSER! >:|". The use of computer lingo such as "ur" and "no 1" and an emoji— an image or combination of symbols intended to represent a specific facial expression or emotional response— is often attributed to younger people, while the pink highlighting of the text subtly suggests that the author is also female. Unlike the CyberSCAN brochure that contained linguistic anchorage of an anti-cyberbullying nature, the linguistic message in this image implicates the viewer into the cyberbullying, as a sort of bystander.

Semiotics suggests that there are various types of signs, not just differing forms; signs can be natural or conventional, and a facial expression or bodily reaction is considered a natural sign. The girls featured alone in Image 1, Image 2, and Image 3 all have bowed heads, which suggests shame, pain, and emotional distress. Two of the girls are hiding their faces with their hands, seemingly wiping away tears, while the darkness of the photo masks the third's face; without a detailed study of the intricacies of body language, this image conveys a sense of

despair, disappointment, humiliation, and intimidation. Now I would like to turn attention to Image 4 and Image 5.

Unlike the other images in this selection, Image 4 and Image 5 feature multiple people. Image 4, which was featured by Maclean's, is an action-shot of the Rehtaeh Parsons march. In the frontline, there are four women and two men seen to be carrying images of Rehtaeh. Marchers are wearing thick jackets, hats, and scarfs, which not only implies time of year, but the cold is often associated with vulnerability and danger. The facial expression of all in the photo showcase down-turned mouths and sullen eyes, and everyone is looking in a different direction. These facial expressions accompanied by body language again suggests such things as pain, disappointment, desperation, despair, and anger. While there is a clear mix of men and women in the photo, most appear to be late-teens and older. Alternatively, Image 5 displays eight young teens, seven assumed females and one assumed male. One girl is holding a cellphone that others are all leaning in to view; the girl with the cellphone as squinting— perhaps from the sun in her eyes— while those around her all have variant expressions. The girl to her right is smiling at the cellphone, while the girl to her left as a somewhat amused, surprised expression. The faces of the other persons in the photo are not as discernable, however, the male has a relatively neutral, slightly amused expression. None of the people in this photo are looking toward the photographer, which again implicates the viewer into the photo as a form of bystander. The disproportionate amount of girls in this photo compared to males further suggests that cyberbullying is a female-centric activity— perpetuated by girls, targeting girls.

Discussion

When the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act was debunked by the Supreme Court in December 2015, "it was declared that the definition of the cyberbullying in the Act was a 'colossal failure' in the ruling" (Quigley, 2016, n.p.); but the question this research sought to answer was whether it failed socially and culturally, as well as legally. The participants in this study— Nova Scotian youth, parents, teachers, government and law enforcement— all varied in their perceptions and conceptualizations of cyberbullying. Across the four core demographic groups, participants offered 50 distinct characteristics and behaviours that they, collectively, attribute to cyberbullying. Of these cohorts, the law enforcement and government participants had the most in common with other groups' conceptualizations with eight of their 10 attributions cross-listed with responses from one or more other cohorts. Law enforcement and government participants shared ideas of "lack of consent", "harassment", and "intention" with the youth cohort; "intimidation" with teachers, and; "anonymity", "boldness", "threatening", and "violence" with the parent cohort. Outside of these 8 concepts, the remaining 42 characteristics and behaviours attributed to cyberbullying were each isolated to single participant groups. The tremendous disconnect evident in Nova Scotian conceptions of cyberbullying confirms the hypothesis that Nova Scotians are operating under inconsistent, convoluted ideas of cyberbullying— including our educators, government, and law enforcement. When cross-referenced with the former Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act's definition of cyberbullying, there were four similarities— intent, intimidation, humiliation, and interpersonal harm. Again, it is unsurprising that this definition aligns most closely with the responses from this study's law enforcement and government cohort, but in this case it is important to remember that this sample included individuals who had worked directly under the old legislation, and so were intimately

familiar with that definition. Other than this single connection, the Cyber Safety Act's definition of cyberbullying only shared one noted attribute/characteristic with each of the remaining three cohorts.

Beyond the already inherent disparity in Nova Scotian concepts of Cyberbullying, the most telling juxtaposition is of youths' cyberbullying definition, and that of everyone else. The most prevalent concept of cyberbullying among youth in this study was the non-consensual sharing of photos online. As one of the Government Enforcement Agents within the CyberSCAN Unit noted, "youth don't understand that if they are under the age of 18, it is a criminal offence to take an intimate image of themselves, and a criminal offence to send it to somebody". Findings within the literature review and primary data collection within this study all suggest that the production and dissemination of intimate photos is a prolific and growing occurrence among Canadian youth. It is not surprising then, that in general audiovisual media such as photos, videos, audio recording comprised nearly 30% of the attributes offered by youth in their descriptions of cyberbullying. Through their various responses, it became apparent that Rehtaeh Parsons is top-of-mind for many participants within this study; because of this, I believe it is important to explore the influence of the Rehtaeh Parsons case on Nova Scotian's perceptions of cyberbullying.

Rehtaeh Parsons was named at some point during the focus group or interviews for every single demographic cohort in this study. Students, parents, teachers, and law enforcement/government alike were all familiar with her name, and the fact that her "cyberbullying" case involved photos of a sexual nature online. Many participants also noted Amanda Todd, though not as many, but again the tragic stories of these young girls mark the bulk of cyberbullying awareness for many Nova Scotians. The Nova Scotia Task Force on

Bullying and Cyberbullying noted that their report to government— which informed the former

Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act— was born in the wake of the tragic stories of these young girls,

and much of the media coverage and discussion of cyberbullying in Nova Scotia before and

surrounding the Act has referred to Rehtaeh Parsons in some capacity. Are we to be surprised

then, that the concepts of cyberbullying instilled in our youth are centered on the non-consensual

dissemination of intimate/sexualized images, and that females are perceived as most at risk? I

would argue that if anything, we should have expected it.

This study undertook a semiological analysis of images pertaining to cyberbullying used

in Nova Scotian government and media publications. The definitive conclusion was that

cyberbullying images in Nova Scotia are heavily coded by gender and signify females as the

centric victims in cyberbullying. Images of cyberbullying in Nova Scotia depict young girls in

hyper-feminized roles through their clothes and their emotional displays and per symbolic

interactionism, we should expect that this has played a formidable role in establishing and

grooming our youths' perceptions. As noted earlier, Bourdieu (1999) suggests that of all the

types of signs, iconic signs like photography establish a transcendent relationship between

signifier and signified: "meaning being related to form without being completely involved in it.

Photography, far from being perceived as signifying itself and nothing else, is always examined

as a sign for something that it is not" (p.74). In the case of cyberbullying, that is true both from a

legal standpoint, and the effect it has on persons involved. If it is true that underlying all semiotic

analyses are three general principles—that all meaning-bearing behaviour and expression have

historical origins, no matter how modern they seem; that codes influence peoples' notions of

what is "normal" human behaviour, and; that the codes within which one grows up influence

their worldviews and perceptions later (Danesi, 1999)— it is undeniable that digital images have

a tremendous influence on cyberbullying, and that feminist and semiotic analysis indicate just how integral images are to the production and reproduction of gender roles, the sexualization of women online, and ultimately rape culture, as societal norms and codes.

On any account, feminist semiotic considerations of images in cyberbullying does not appear to have reached popularity in research; feminism is considered at great length, as is the semiotics of imagery, but combined they seem to offer a great deal of insight into this particular social issue. This study has illustrated just how deeply the cyberbullying perspectives of Nova Scotians', particularly youth, are permeated by gender inequality and female disadvantage. In the age-old challenge of chicken and egg, it is hard to say whether women are targeted through cyberbullying more than males, or whether their online victimization is just reported more and understood more firmly as cyberbullying because it fits what we as a society have come to understand cyberbullying to be. As I have noted above, research has long pointed to the internet as a perpetuator of male dominance and misogyny, and so the frequent display of females as the "traditional" victims of cyberbullying in Nova Scotia only proliferate the issue. Canadian criminal law, for the most part, dons a "one size fits all" (Mathen, 2014, p.531) approach to cyberbullying and sexual violence online; however, in recent years, formalized legal efforts such as Bill C-13— the Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act— and the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act are setting the path for greater differentiation between the two offences. As one of the law enforcement participants in this research noted, perhaps one of the first steps we need to make as a country is reconsidering our criminal code: "our criminal code is out of date and half the time doesn't cover the types of things we find in cases involving online communication". Having an outdated criminal code that does not account for new technologies and the new forms of interpersonal communication it provides can be problematic for legal developments in

cyberbullying prevention. Forming and enacting new legislation on a criminal code that is not up to the task is like building a home on a crumbling foundation— it is not likely the most effective or well-thought-out plan.

Symbolic interactionism, at its core, is the theory that society is the product of shared meanings and social patterns created during social interactions. The participants in this research often could not name a source for their conceptualization of cyberbullying, and rather said it was something they "gained over time", which I would alternatively phrase as gaining through social interaction. I opened this study with the hypothesis that Canadian's understandings of cyberbullying stem from three perspectives—social, cultural, and legal— that radiate in concentric circles from interpersonal communication to legislation. Employing feminist theory and semiotics, this study further argues that among the various perceptions of cyberbullying, misconceptions of gendered differences and sexualized online violence are among the most prevalent and pressing concerns. These hypotheses have been supported and evidenced by the key role the tragic story of Rehtaeh Parsons has played in our social and cultural understandings of cyberbullying in Nova Scotia; however, our understandings have stemmed from predominantly social perspectives. Sexual violence, and in many cases images of youth, are covered under criminal code in Canada, and yet socially and culturally we are still failing to make that distinction.

In the discourse analysis of documents including and pertaining to the former Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act, I noted that the Nova Scotia Task Force on Bullying and Cyberbullying made a contradictory statement in their report (NSTF, 2012) that first said, "our laws should reflect our core values and principles and indicate what we stand for as a society" (p.48), followed by "one of the important roles of law in society is to change attitudes and values about

what is inappropriate and blameworthy conduct. The role of law in changing views…" (p.48). So what then is the role of law in this instance? Given the convoluted understandings of cyberbullying in Nova Scotia socially and culturally, it is hard to discern the role that the law has played in forming those understandings, specifically when considering intimate images and sexual violence. Legally, sexual violence and the dissemination of intimate photos are covered under criminal and federal law, but since the definition of cyberbullying in the former Nova Scotian legislation was so broad and vague, it is understandable that the Government Enforcement Agents within the CyberSCAN Unit reported that many of the cases brought to them as "cyberbullying" often contained a criminal element. Legal definitions require understandings and concepts that are far more definitive and stable than our social and cultural understandings require, and as Nova Scotians, our core values and principles surrounding cyberbullying are not unified enough to hold a strong influence on our laws. Despite this reality, it would also appear that our laws are not yet poised to play a role in changing our views.

A matter of concern to consider now is that if law does indeed play a significant role in formulating our views of cyberbullying in Nova Scotia, what is it saying to us? The repeal of the Nova Scotian Cyber Safety Act, and the subsequent time it is taking to replace the legislation, or formally address cyberbullying in an alternative way is suggestive that cyberbullying is not a significant issue that needs immediate address, and yet based on the responses of participants in this study it is of utmost concern. Should this core value not then, as the Task Force stated, be reflected in our laws? This was the model I proposed when I posited that, in a symbolic interactionist framework, social interactions lead to cultural understandings, which influence legal definitions and decisions. While I maintain that social interactions surrounding cyberbullying have led to our cultural understandings as Nova Scotians, I would have to say the

findings as to whether our legal definitions are influenced by our cultural understandings are inconclusive. While stories like Rehtaeh Parsons's played a substantial and undeniable influence on the creation of our first cyberbullying legislation in Nova Scotia, it is not as clear that our cultural understandings are influencing our legal decisions now.

By exploring traditional and current definitions and conceptualizations of cyberbullying in social and legal contexts, one of the primary goals of this research was to highlight how current prevention and intervention strategies in Nova Scotia fail to account for the varying perspectives of all groups they affect. The Nova Scotia Task Force's report was heavily informed by external parties/stakeholders, and in many ways adequately addressed the needs and concerns of parties involved; however, the continued or resultant prevention and intervention strategies found in law, education, and community services are still greatly lacking. One of the most prominent strategies in bullying prevention is teaching kids not to be bystanders. The nature of cyberbullying makes this all the more difficult since, as has been previously discussed, violence online tends to be crowdsourced— there is a mob mentality to the aggression, yet alternatively, it is also easier for someone to turn a blind eye because people are dehumanized online. When I asked youth in this study questions pertaining to prevention and intervention in cyberbullying, it yielded an interesting result— a unanimous contradiction of perception and intention. While saying that cyberbullying victims should turn to their peers, youth also state that they are hesitant to get involved themselves in the event that their friend won't trust them anymore. Collectively, the youth in this study declared that they do not feel that adults— including parents and teachers— are adequately prepared to effectively intervene: parents, they say, are too biased toward their own children, and they don't feel that teachers and schools have a responsibility to get involved. Since participants in this study all agreed that youth are the most at risk for

cyberbullying, it stands to reason that their perspectives and behaviours be paramount in the development of prevention and intervention strategies, and one of the core take-aways from this study is the recognition that we need to stop asking ourselves who is responsible for intervening in cyberbullying, and first ask who affected youth are likely to turn to first. Based on responses in this study, youth are most likely to turn to their peers first, and then possibly their teachers. This solidifies that as a society, we are not entirely wrong to turn to the educational system for a solution to cyberbullying, but as it stands, "schools are being held accountable but [they] are not really prepared to address the problem" (quoted from teacher cohort).

I argue that based on the findings in this study, if we are to ever progress as a province and country in cyberbullying prevention and intervention, we must first solidify our social, cultural, and legal understandings— most immediately, our definitions. The lack of cohesion is a detriment not only to our province, but to our country and the longer we wait without taking a unified stance, the longer Canadians will suffer from online victimization. Across stakeholder demographics in this study, the unanimous response from participants was that in order to effectively combat cyberbullying, we must enhance our educational programing and information sharing.

Participants in this study felt strongly that we must take a unified approach to combating cyberbullying— that everyone has a role to play— however when asked further questions about responsibility or who persons affected by cyberbullying should turn to, participants often were quick to point fingers somewhere other than themselves. In many ways, cyberbullying is the Nova Scotian game of hot-potato; everyone sees the problem and is afraid of being burned, but nobody wants to be the one stuck dealing with it. This research illustrates that much of the hesitancy and even aversion to getting involved in proactively preventing or intervening in

cyberbullying comes from a lack of knowledge and support. Only a select few of the law enforcement and government cohort in this study had ever received any form of formal training or education surrounding cyberbullying; the remaining participants in the study all indicated that had never received any training, and in many cases had never had the opportunity. For most participants, the media and online search engines were their primary resources for learning.

The trouble with so much of the information gathering among this study's participants having come from the media, or in some cases movies, is that there is no regulation behind it. The media often includes positional statements, and more generally includes concepts, law, perspectives, and cases of an international nature that do not— and perhaps should not— inform those of Nova Scotians. Perhaps this is an area beyond its definition that the Nova Scotian Cyber Safety Act failed Nova Scotia. In many ways, the creation of the Cyber Safety Act was a step in the right direction for Nova Scotia, and Canada more broadly. For the first time we were taking a focused, concerted approach to addressing cyberbullying and the entire process has served as a learning experience for the Task Force and government. However, it did not serve as a learning experience for the individuals that participated in this study.

As a researcher in the communications field, it was surprising to learn that in many cases— specifically law enforcement/government and teachers— there was little to no awareness of the former cyberbullying legislation, what it meant, and how it involved/affected them personally and/or professionally. In addition, parents were an inherent element in the former legislation— their cooperation and involvement a necessity for cases involving youth— and yet again, none of the parent participants in this study seemed to understand how the old legislation affected them, the opportunities or services it provided, and in some cases that it even existed. More importantly, most youth were unaware of the old legislation, including the CyberSCAN

Unit. How are we to expect Nova Scotians to make use of a support program if they are not aware of it? Following the repeal of the Cyber Safety Act, the CyberSCAN Unit has been focusing its efforts on educational programming— specifically, the educational presentation they offer schools and upon requests. I firmly suggest that in addition to these efforts, the Nova Scotian Department of Justice reevaluate its mass-communication strategies, outreach strategies, and visibility awareness of its cyberbullying initiatives for any ongoing and future cyberbullying initiatives because the reality is that if we are not effectively communicating the actions we are taking, it further exacerbates the fact that ultimately, we just really aren't doing enough.

A common sentiment among participants in this study was that we need to stop looking at cyberbullying prevention and intervention as something that can be solved through one-off educational programming. Participants noted that in order to achieve a collective, unified approach to cyberbullying we need to educate those with the greatest potential to educate and influence others:

> "We need programs to teach in school… an actual class itself for youth, and an educational support for parents. Also, cyberbullying and online safety should be a unit of learning for new teachers." (law enforcement/government)

> "We should have province-wide concise education with built-in programming, not one-off presentations here and there. Cyberbullying and online safety need to be taught in schools, just like sex-ed. It needs to be in the curriculum." (Parent)

> "Educate the leaders in our communities with holistic education, not just our kids." (Parent)

> "We need a good, strong system around the victims… more community building and education, more exposure and awareness." (Teacher)

Participants said we need to build awareness and visibility in our province— not only of cyberbullying itself, but of the resources and education available surrounding it. This is ever more important now that we do not have an active legislation protecting Nova Scotians from cyberbullying, because for now at least, our residents are largely responsible for protecting themselves.

Updates from the Nova Scotia Department of Justice

As I indicated above, two participants within this study identify as Government

Enforcement Agents, and they have worked directly under the repealed Nova Scotia Cyber

Safety Act within the Department of Justice's CyberSCAN Unit. According to these participants,

the primary service the CyberSCAN Unit provided under the old legislation was forming a

bridge between parents, schools, and the police:

> When we had the legislation, it gave us the authority to investigate complaints (…) We
>
> could go out and meet with people face-to-face and it gave us the authority to contact
>
> social media sites. A lot of our job was mediating disputes and offering presentations.
>
> Since the legislation was struck down, we focus mostly on the presentation… we do still
>
> have our phone line and we do still take calls, but we can only offer advice. I feel we
>
> need legislative authority in order to deal with cyberbullying.

Between September 30, 2013 and December 11, 2015— when the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act

was struck down— the CyberSCAN Unit handled 823 complaints and offered more than 800

presentations to schools and the public. During this time, only 10 cases had to be taken to court

and resulted in Cyberbullying Prevention Orders; the rest were resolved through means outside

of the court system.

For all the good the Nova Scotia Cyber Safety Act enabled this Unit to do, the old

legislation was problematic, according to these Government Enforcement Agents, and not only

for its broad definition. When cases were taken through the CyberSCAN Unit, Agents had the

opportunity to vet cases, and establish if something was indeed cyberbullying, if it crossed into a

criminal offense, and could determine a best course of action for victims and their families while

offering support and advice. However, the old legislation also enabled the public to contact a

Justice of the Peace with their own evidence and present it themselves. A Justice of the Peace

would make a decision if a Cyberbullying Prevention Order would be placed on the other

individual whom to this point could have no prior knowledge of the case: accused individuals

would not be notified of the court hearing, and they would not be given the opportunity to

provide their own evidence during the hearing. The Government Enforcement Agents that

participated in this study indicated that they feel Nova Scotia is now poised to re-evaluate the

problems with Nova Scotia's first cyberbullying legislation, beyond the definition, and come out

stronger in the end: "we know that a new legislation is a priority for the government, they have

committed to some form of new legislation, but we just don't know when or what yet… we just

hope it is sooner rather than later".

When I engaged the Nova Scotia Minister of Justice, the Honourable Diana Whalen in

conversation, she confirmed the Department's interest in a new legislation, however, the future

of one was less certain. The Minister has publicly noted that she feels we should replace the

legislation, and the Justice Department is in the process of coming up with a few options, but no

new legislation has been approved, and there isn't a new one ready to go— "There is always the

possibility that it won't be replaced," says the Minister, "and in fact, there are some who say a

replacement isn't needed." Minister Whalen indicated that when the first legislation was enacted,

all political parties supported it, but the reality is that a new legislation will likely be challenged

again:

> The old legislation was created in the heat of the moment, but I was surprised that it was
>
> struck down entirely. That means that we have to rewrite everything and it put an
>
> immediate stop to existing work with the CyberSCAN Unit. In fact, the day after the
>
> legislation was struck down there was evidence that resolved cases of the past resurfaced

because there was no protection in place. I recognize that the Department of Justice needs

to take a role in this. (Minister of Justice, Diana Whalen)

One of the main considerations the Department of Justice is examining at the moment is whether

they should design a legislation specifically for youth, or if they should create one that applied to

everyone. The narrower the legislation, the easier it will be to defend, however, the Minister

recognizes that it is hard to say if we should "ignore that a lot of adults have legitimate

concerns"; in further detail, the CyberSCAN Unit notes that the 10 cases they actually had to

take to court all involved adults, and so it does add weight to this consideration. As I previously

mentioned in this study's findings, just because most people tend to think of cyberbullying as

something between youth, that doesn't prevent it from affecting others. In her closing comment

the Minister stated that the CyberSCAN Unit is outside much of the work conducted in the

Department of Justice: "we are not often in direct contact with the public, but this was a

different, more direct service that appeared effective; but while creating new legislation is

definitely in the process right now, there is no guarantee that the first Act will be replaced".

Conclusions and Final Considerations

Conceptualizing cyberbullying in a concise, universal definition is no easy task. There is a reason scholars, organizations, and law are struggling to adequately detail the limits and specific characteristics of cyberbullying— our social and cultural understandings derive, or are at least informed, by our social interactions and experiences. This means that one person's idea of cyberbullying is heavily crafted by their personal experience with it. Those with direct personal experience are likely to have stronger opinions than those who have not been personally affected, but overall it appears that the media plays a significant role in shaping our norms and values. In Nova Scotia, media portrayal of cyberbullying has largely centered around the stories of young females who were sexually victimized in some way; these stories formed the basis of social and legal conversations that now, more than four years later, we can see the impact they have had on our overall society.

Nova Scotians are disconnected, unconfident, hesitant, and often misinformed in their conceptions of cyberbullying and online safety. While the disconnect is strong across parental, educational, and legal networks, it is even greater generationally. Norman Denzin (1987) suggested that "it is the task of the symbolic interactionist to determine the exact place of semiotics in social psychology" (p.1); by combining symbolic interactionism with semiotics and feminist theory, this study has succeeded in highlighting the integral relationship between images infused with gendered and sexualized codes, and our societal learning and growth surrounding cyberbullying. Youth in Nova Scotia have been heavily influenced by social norms and codes that proliferate gender inequality, misogyny, the hyper-sexualization of women, and the vulnerability of females in general. As technology advances, images have become increasingly integral to technological communication, and so with these two forces combined we should not

be surprised that the production and dissemination of intimate photography is prolific among today's youth, nor that their concepts of cyberbullying are centered specifically around it. Rehtaeh Parsons is the household name for cyberbullying in Nova Scotia, and when such a tragic story was handed such a definitive label, conceptions of what is characteristically cyberbullying and what is inherently sexual violence began to blend. Youth in Nova Scotia do not recognize the criminal elements involved in intimate imagery and it seems that everything is perceived as a tier below its actual significance— the dissemination of intimate imagery is "cyberbullying", while the characteristics other demographics conceive as cyberbullying are known to some of the youth in this study as "drama". Law is drawing stronger differentiation between online behaviours and what is criminal law, and what is or should be civil law, and in doing so there is growing a deeper legal understanding that sexually violent or intimate images and cyberbullying are two different things, but we lack the same understanding as a society and culture. Perhaps if we develop more concrete legal definitions it will help influence more cohesive, appropriate, social and cultural understandings as well.

I believe Nova Scotia is poised to maximize this opportunity to learn from our past failures to make better decisions now and in future. Organizational learning, as it was discussed, will help us make the most of what history and our recent experiences have taught us and enable us to continue making strides toward a stronger, more inclusive online community. While cyberbullying is an increasingly prolific and tragic issue in our society, our efforts to combat it are currently at a stand-still, and this should be of great concern to Nova Scotians. Having realized how destitute Nova Scotians are for an informed, proactive approach to cyberbullying, it is disheartening to think that support for a replacement legislation is waning. If nothing new is enacted, and no changes occur, Nova Scotia will experience the crisis of failed organizational

learning, which is the cyclical and repetitional horror of reliving past mistakes. We will continue

to point the finger of responsibility to schools and teachers that are misinformed and/or ill-

equipped to tackle the problem, and like the influx of resurfaced/new cyberbullying cases that

came immediately after the repeal of the Cyber Safety Act, cyberbullying will continue to grow

and plague Nova Scotia youth, with likely even fewer reporting their victimization. Ultimately,

as our society is continually formed by our social interactions, cyberbullying could become even

more normalized in youth behavior than it already is.

Moving forward, the province of Nova Scotia needs to focus on three primary goals:

solidifying a concise, effective conceptualization/definition of cyberbullying; instituting this

concept in formal and/or legal terms that are accessible and visible, and; enhancing our education

and information sharing surrounding cyberbullying in Nova Scotia. The former Nova Scotia

Cyber Safety Act was a step in the right direction, and even though it helped serve over 800

Nova Scotians in its tenure, the reality is that the bulk of participants in this research were still

widely unaware of its existence and/or value. In order for a prevention or intervention strategy

for cyberbullying to be effective, it has to be properly communicated.

While this study was concentrated within Nova Scotia, its application can span the

country As Nova Scotian Minister of Justice, the Honourable Diana Whalen stated:

> The rest of the country saw us with the first Act, and they have held back to see how we
>
> did. The truth is that we are still in new ground, but with the rest of the country watching,
>
> I think it is important that we don't abandon the issue. We need to continue to strive for a
>
> path that other provinces can emulate… I would like us as Nova Scotians to be leaders.

Nova Scotia as a province has the privilege of housing a large urban center, as well as remote,

rural communities, and so youth in our region offer relative experiences and lifestyles found

across the country. Perhaps our current generations of youth stand the most to gain from proactive anti-cyberbullying efforts now; however, like a domino effect, the positive impact of healthier, safer environments online for youth will radiate out from their individual experiences to those of their families, educators, and subsequent generations.

Solidifying a formal definition of cyberbullying, as well as determining best practices and specific programmatic components of effective prevention and intervention strategies is beyond the scope of this study, but is vital research that would build upon this study's findings and continue to inform Nova Scotia's future cyberbullying initiatives and legal developments. Since, as I wrote in my introduction, Canada has ranked 26th and 27th in bullying and victimization respectively on an international evaluation of 35 countries, there are at least 25 other nations we could stand to learn from. Making informed plans for better cyberbullying prevention and intervention strategies need not be based solely on academic research or primary data collection— it can grow from improved global awareness and increased organizational learning. Earlier I noted that if nothing changes in Nova Scotia, organizational learning theory purposes that we will continue to suffer from the same crisis over and over, but why can we not take pause and appreciate that while we may be the first in our country, we are not the first in the world. Many have crossed this bridge before us, and we may find benefit to following in the footsteps of others— perhaps even as far as to find ourselves on the other side.

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Appendix A: Research Tools

A1: Proposed Research Questions

A2: Data Analysis Codes

A1: Research Questions

This research involved interviews with individuals within four defined stakeholder groups— youth/students, parents, government and law enforcecment, and teachers and school administrators. One list of interview questions was created to guide interviews with all participants, with the purpose of better supporting comparison and analysis across stakeholder groups. However, there were several group-specific questions for each demographic, and with any qualitative, open-ended interview, participant discussion at times diverged from premeditated questions, but only through the direction of the participant.

General Questions:
- What behaviours and characteristics exist in cyberbullying?
- How do you define cyberbullying?
- Where or how did you learn that definition?
- Do you perceive cyberbullying to be a major issue?
- What other types of victimization or interpersonal harm that take place online?
- Who is most at risk of being cyberbullied? Why do you think that is?
- What supports exist for persons affected by cyberbullying? What supports are needed?
- What do you know about Nova Scotia's efforts to address cyberbullying?
- Who should be responsible for intervening in and preventing cyberbullying?
- If you wanted more information on cyberbullying, where would you go?

Specifically for Youth:
- How would you respond if someone you are close to became engaged in cyberbullying—as a victim? As a bully?
- Who should someone being cyberbullied turn to for help?
- Are adults (parents, teachers, etc.) able to intervene in cyberbullying effectively?

Specifically for Parents, Law Enforcement/Policy Officials, Teachers/School Administrators:
- Do you feel adequately prepared to intervene in and prevent cyberbullying?
- What specific training or formal guidance have you received surrounding cyberbullying?
- What do you think the best approach to addressing cyberbullying in Nova Scotia would be?

A2: Data Analysis Codes

- Feminist morals/ideas such as gender equality/inequality and roles
- Differing behavioural/action categories in definitions (ie. sexual, aggressive, physical violence, emotional violence, name-calling, etc.)
- Dismissal, down-play, and/or passive aggression toward cyberbullying as an issue
- Abdication or re-appointment of responsibility
- Confusion, lack of clarity, or contradiction in individual responses
- Consistency in definitions/perceptions/understandings (ie. recurring themes, words, etc.)
- Patterns of learning and transmission of information between and beyond stakeholder groups

Appendix B: Discourse and Semiological Analysis Content

B1: Mainstream Media Results

B2: Government of Nova Scotia Content

B1: Mainstream Media Results

Image 1: Global News

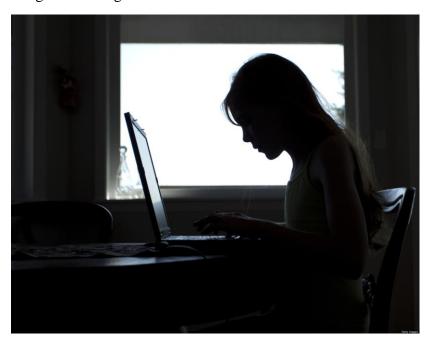Image 2: CBC News

Image 3: Huffington Post

Image 4: Maclean's

B2: Government of Nova Scotia Content

Image 5: Antibullying Nova Scotia Website

Image 6: CyberSCAN Brochure