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Vice-Chair

Ms. Pam Damoff

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● (1550)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Thank you to our witnesses for coming. We're resuming our study on violence against young women and girls in Canada, and today we're looking at cyberviolence.

I want to thank our first panellists, Shaheen Shariff and Lara Karaian. I understand, Shaheen, you've come by train from Montreal, so we want to thank you for going out of your way to be here with us today.

You have 10 minutes for your presentations, and then we'll go to questions.

Dr. Shaheen Shariff (Associate Professor, Faculty of Education and Associate Member, Law Faculty, McGill University, As an Individual): Shall I start?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Yes, please.

Dr. Shaheen Shariff: Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee this afternoon to speak on the nature and extent of cyberviolence against girls and women and the best practices to address and prevent it.

I will discuss pertinent issues in the context of two key areas that I understand the committee is examining, because my work is moving in that direction, building on earlier research on cyberbullying and sexting.

The role of universities in addressing online and on-campus rape culture is one area. A second one is the impact of hypersexualization of women and girls in popular culture and media. The third is opportunities to engage these sectors with universities encountering such practices.

I would like to emphasize at the outset that sexual violence, whether online or offline, cannot be reduced or prevented without increased recognition of rape culture as deeply rooted within every aspect of society, and that there is a need for concerted, long-term, collaborative efforts by key segments of society to unearth, dismantle, and address it.

The definition of “rape culture” that best describes my understanding of it, drawing on feminist theories, is as follows, and we'll be providing references with a proper brief: rape culture is the way in which sexist societal attitudes, assumptions, and language tacitly condone, minimize, and/or normalize sexual violence, mostly against women but also against other genders, through institutions, communities, and individuals.

Rooted in discrimination, rape culture surfaces—and this is important—along a continuum of intersecting sexist behaviours which include jokes, innuendoes, harassment, online and offline threats, non-consensual distribution of intimate images online, physical assault, and rape.

There are several challenges for universities. Canadian universities have come under significant student criticism and media scrutiny for slow or inefficient responses to reports of sexual violence. Examples involving cyberviolence include sexually offensive postings, such as a dental school case in which students created a social media page and discussed raping their female classmates after drugging them with chloroform, and one in which male student leaders joked online about raping a female student union president because of her leadership position.

Some of the task force reports that followed some of these widely publicized incidents observed that although rape culture in broader society is mirrored within universities, few empirically based studies have focused on the influence of media and popular culture on the university communities. They also highlighted a lack of communication between central administration and faculties and a lack of clarity on reporting processes and responses that ensured due process.

Policy administrators and the legal community, including judges, are often out of touch with young women's or in fact young people's realities and evolving social norms in an online society, as we have seen. Many of you may have heard about the recent rape case at Stanford. It is important to remember that university and high school students are prolific consumers of social media and popular culture, comedy, sexist and misogynist online jokes, music lyrics, hypersexualized advertising, etc., but it is adults who, by and large, create and perpetuate this type of content, so why are we surprised that young people internalize it?

Shifting norms and a higher threshold for sexism and homophobia start at a younger age, and this goes back to our research on sexting and cyberbullying. In this research we looked at young people between the ages of nine and 17. We found that at least 65% said that they would engage in the non-consensual distribution of intimate images and sexting for fun or to make friends laugh—65%—especially the age group between 13 and 17.

The legal intent in online offensive postings is difficult to establish. I'll just tell you about two scenarios that we gave the students as part of our research. We received some interesting findings.

The first scenario was that Dana is drunk, and a video of her being drunk is posted online. Does Dana have a right to be upset about it? Ninety-eight per cent of the students, both male and female, said that yes, she has every right to be upset about it because her parents will find out she was drunk at a party.

● (1555)

The second scenario was that Ashley sends an intimate video or photograph of herself to a boyfriend, in trust. That boyfriend takes that video and puts it online. Does she have a right to be upset? Well, 51% said it was not okay for her to be upset because she brought it on herself, supposedly.

There was less emphasis on the breach of trust by the boyfriend or on him having any accountability for his actions. The irony is that victim blaming is so prevalent in our society, and as we have seen in recent cases under the criminal justice systems both in Canada and the U.S., it's mirrored in how these teens are behaving or thinking. This increases the threshold for rape culture. It becomes normalized in the way our young people speak, the music lyrics they listen to, and the violence and sexism they witness in popular culture and gaming, but it's also part of adult society. It ends up that applying traditional institutional policies and punishments is of no use, because they are no longer relevant. Social norms have changed and need to be addressed through responses that resonate with young people and responses that are comprehensive and holistic.

In this regard, I want to emphasize and highlight the power of social media to uproot rape culture and promote positive cultural change. Social media provides—as we have again seen in some of these recent cases—a wide platform for standing up to sexual violence. Critical and educational dialogues can be carried out over social media to unearth and expose rape culture. People can stand up to offensive online postings.

It has enabled—for example, in the Jian Gomeshi case very early on—people to come forward through #rapebutneverreported, which went viral, as well as the one in Quebec that was in French. The Stanford rape survivor's heart-wrenching statement was spread prolifically online, and people were upset about the lenient six-month sentence, which drew harsh criticism. The response by the rapist's father as well—that his son would pay a high price of six months for 20 minutes of action—also drew a very angry response. *The New York Times*, for example, noted that this suggests that society has begun to turn the page and stand up against sexual violence and that the Internet has been instrumental in raising awareness.

How much time do I have left?

● (1600)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You have about two minutes.

Dr. Shaheen Shariff: Big-stick sanctions won't work. We're obviously looking for greater accountability on the part of perpetrators, but this cannot be achieved by harsher, reactive laws within our criminal justice system, because when rape culture is so normalized, such laws will not necessarily help young people understand where they are going wrong or where they crossed the line to engage in illegal activities.

One example is the application of child pornography laws that are designed to protect young people being applied against them when they engage in sexting, especially at a younger age. For example, a number of 11- to 13-year-old students who were playing with Snapchat got their female classmates to send them pictures; these students were charged with distribution, possession, and production of child pornography. In the Maple Ridge case in 2011 in British Columbia, in which a girl was gang-raped and a teen posted it online, the teen was sentenced to write an essay on the evils of the Internet, which just shows how disconnected some of the judges are and calls for a need—and this is just one case, along with the Stanford case—for education of judges and people in the legal profession.

The Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act, although it has a section on non-consensual distribution of intimate images, is not likely in and of itself to have great impact on reducing this kind of behaviour.

As conclusions and recommendations, it's essential for universities to reclaim responsibility—and I'm just going to focus on universities here, being from one—and as central educational institutions of higher learning to take ownership and to educate on owning the problem. We have the capacity to develop curriculum models and policy models that would position Canada at the forefront internationally on an informed and evidence-based strategy on addressing sexual violence.

We have started this process at McGill—and I'd be happy to give more details in the question time—working with several universities and arts and media sectors towards understanding how each sector either tacitly condones rape culture or can mobilize change through changes to policy and practice.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You actually have almost an extra minute there.

Thank you very much.

We'll go to Ms. Karaian.

Dr. Lara Karaian (Associate Professor, Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Carleton University, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

This is my first time speaking to a parliamentary committee, and I'm very happy to be here. For the first time in my life going to speak slowly, I hope.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about cyberviolence against young women and girls. Given my limited time, my comments today will centre around one of my areas of expertise, which is the non-consensual redistribution of consensually created and shared sexual images. This is commonly referred to as revenge porn, non-consensual porn, or virtual rape, as some people call it, although none of these terms are accurate descriptors, in my opinion. Given that the language that we use to understand and shape our responses to cybersexual violence is important, I'm happy to speak to why I think these terms are not the most accurate in the question-and-answer period, if you'd like.

Many girls and young women whose sexual images and videos are non-consensually redistributed experience this as a violation of their sexual autonomy and their privacy. Possible consequences include psychological and emotional distress, negative impacts on interpersonal and romantic relationships, and concerns about the inability to secure employment or the potential loss of employment. In addition, we know that the threat of redistribution is being used to intimidate, extort, and harass individuals.

I'm going to leave questions of prevalence to others. I know somebody from MediaSmarts is going to be here, and I think Jane may speak to that in the second panel. Instead I'm going to provide you with a somewhat challenging and potentially alternative perspective on how to reconceptualize the problem and to do no harm in our attempts to address cybersexual violence.

Status of Women in Canada, in its brief called “Sexual Violence Against Women in Canada”, has already acknowledged that intersectionality—which is how the intersections between different aspects of a person's identity and social location can leave some people more vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence than others—ought to inform Status of Women of Canada's research and endeavours.

I, along with other researchers today, have highlighted already how girls and women who experience non-consensual redistribution suffer differently and disproportionately from most, although not all, boys whose images are non-consensually redistributed because of sexual double standards, which importantly are always already raced, classed, ableist, and heteronormative in nature.

I have critiqued child protection, law enforcement, and legislative efforts, which capitalize on sexual double standards in their own efforts by deploying “slut-shaming” when they encourage young women and girls to abstain from digitally representing themselves and their sexuality if they don't want to be victims of non-consensual redistribution.

Today I'd like to urge the committee members to maintain a focus on intersectionality as they move forward with the development of responses to cybersexual violence, and in particular I'd like to ask you to consider how the harms of non-consensual redistribution not only stem from discriminatory attitudes towards girls who break the boundaries of convention by displaying themselves as sexual beings, a.k.a. sluts, but also—and this is the challenging part—how these harms stem from the perception of these girls as porn stars.

I would like to ask us to bring whore-phobia and porn-phobia into our discussion of cybersexual violation.

By “whore-phobia” I'm referring to the stigma faced by sex workers—women in porn, those who are doing street and indoor sex work, and strippers. As some scholars at Carleton, at University of Ottawa, and sex activists have argued, whore-phobia includes conceptions of sex workers as dirty, immoral, hypersexualized vectors of disease.

By “porn-phobia” I'm referring to what I conceive of as moral panics about the so-called pornification of culture and the perspective that even consensually created and distributed porn is at best low-value speech and at worst inherently degrading, objectifying, and a violation of women's sexual autonomy.

I'm a porn studies scholar and cultural criminologist. My research on the legal regulation of public sexuality and sexual expression evidences how the category of “whore” acts as a marker for those who are deemed not worthy of victim status or who are hypervisible as victims in need of saving by the state against their wishes.

● (1605)

Whore-phobia and porn-phobia tacitly inform our understanding of and responses to the non-consensual redistribution of sexual images—that is, when young women and girls subjectively experience the violation of their trust and their privacy as a violation of their body, they do so in part because our prurient society nevertheless maintains discriminatory attitudes toward sex workers and the sex industry. We can see this in the historic and ongoing mistreatment of sex workers by police and the state, as well as in recent campaigns by sex workers aimed at humanizing sex workers, such as the “Prostitutes are people too” campaign, developed by the Halifax-based sex workers' group Stepping Stone.

When we, with the best of intentions, construct the non-consensual redistribution of a girl's sexual images as “the worst thing that can happen to her”, as detrimental to her relationships and career, and even as a life-threatening event, we are relying on whore-phobia and porn-phobia to do this. We are not only harming the girls whose images have been redistributed—because we are giving them the message that they should feel horrible about this redistribution—but we are also unintentionally doing harm to another highly marginalized group of “othered” girls and women, those in the sex industry.

Therefore, given your mandate to understand cybersexual violence's connection to systemic and pre-existing discriminatory relations such as sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia, I am asking you to also consider how sex workers themselves are particularly at risk of violence, sexual or otherwise, when we construct public displays of one's sexuality in these extreme terms and come down on them as hard as we do in legal terms.

In terms of responses, while it is extremely important to educate young people about how their shifting sexual and communication norms intersect with and sometimes contravene legal categories such as assault, sexual assault, harassment, defamation, and the distribution of child porn, equal emphasis—as Shaheen also said—must be placed on educating law enforcement, crown prosecutors, judges, Parliament, ourselves, educators, parents, and teens about discriminatory attitudes toward quasi-public, non-monogamous, and non-normative sexuality and its representations.

As I have argued extensively in my research, charging teenagers who non-consensually redistribute their peers' sexual images with child pornography charges is a grossly disproportionate response to the offence and goes against the intentions of those who first drafted those laws. As an expert witness now for two constitutional challenges to the application of child porn laws in the non-distribution context, I can attest to the fact that these laws are being misused against racialized youth—in one case an indigenous girl and a racialized young man—who had no intention of distributing child pornography, nor even causing harm. The second distribution case was an individual boasting about the attractiveness of his girlfriend.

Moving forward, I would like to encourage committee members to consider how sex-positive feminism is an important theoretical frame to engage with in discussions of online sexual violence. Promoting women's pleasure and their right to cybersexual expression should be a critical part of education about responses to sexual violence, whether online or offline. Indeed Jane Doe, who sued the police for failing to warn women in downtown Toronto of a serial rapist, has argued that our educational responses to rape, offline and online, should include a sex education curriculum from a young age that includes discussions of “pleasure, communication, mutual appreciation and technique”, and these days, digital sexual expression is technique.

The federal government has already made positive steps in this direction with the introduction of updated sex education, including education about respect and consent. I am hopeful that we will continue to move forward with a critical lens on our discussions of cybersexual violence. I look forward to discussing this further in the question-and-answer period.

Thank you.

● (1610)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much for your presentation.

Because we started late, I am wondering if the committee is okay with cutting the first round from seven minutes each to six minutes each. Is that okay?

We are going to start the first round with Ms. Sahota. You have six minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Is it okay if I let Eva take my turn, because she really wants to...?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Okay, go ahead.

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you for your presentations, Mrs. Shariff and Mrs. Karaian.

My question is to Mrs. Karaian.

Your work, “Selfies, Sexuality and Teens: A Canadian Study”, is about the context surrounding criminal diversion programs, online Internet safety initiatives, and public service announcements, or PSAs. I was wondering if you could comment further on the concept you appear to use, “sexters as objects of thought”.

Dr. Lara Karaian: Sexters as objects of...?

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Of thought. We're trying to further understand the phenomenon of hypersexualization of young women and girls and the prevalence of cyberviolence in a time when essentially every child can have access to personal devices with access to the Internet. I think if you could explain this conflict, it might help all of us on this issue.

Dr. Lara Karaian: Yes, thank you.

Part of the idea about constructing sexters as objects of thought is that, for one, my particular project was very interested in understanding sexters as subjects of sexual production creation. In particular, when we think of sexters as objects of thought, partially what we're doing is turning them into objects of study without hearing how they themselves are experts on their own sexualities and their own sexual expression. When we study sexting and sexters as objects without also understanding how young people understand themselves and their sexting practices, we construct them as objects of study and we do not learn from them about their shifting cultural, communication, and sexual norms.

For me it's been extremely important to speak to young people about how they understand sexting, how they understand sexual representation in the digital age and their own sexuality. I think many of us here have found that for young people today, there are lots of panics around hypersexualization and the sexualization of young people, lots of fears about exploitation of young women, that don't take into consideration how sexual expression by young women is in fact an integral part of their self-development, their autonomous self-understanding as individuals with autonomy, who are not only sexual objects but also sexual subjects. This is in fact very important for how we understand how best to respond to sexual violence, because when we create women as passive objects that the state always has to come and rescue, we are doing them a disservice in many respects.

Many of my findings have young women saying that their use of technology to express their sexuality is often not a product of peer pressure; it is not necessarily a direct.... That's not to say that there is no correlation, but it's not necessarily a causation of porn, an emulation of porn, or even a sexualized culture. Instead, they understand themselves in many respects as sexual beings within this culture, and they are able to express themselves as such in ways that they find useful. These expressions obviously come with harms and repercussions, but it is also important to understand their pleasures and their affordances.

Hopefully that answers your question.

● (1615)

Mrs. Eva Nassif: I have another question.

Do you find that the will for participation in these acts, even if it's intended to be private, is exacerbating the hypersexuality of women, again specifically young women and girls, in a way we haven't seen before? Is it producing ideas about women different from those that come through other media that may already objectify women, as we see in advertisements or pop culture?

Here is another part of the question. What is, in your opinion, the right path to take when it comes to education of youth on this subject? Do we have to educate from a young age that sexual liberation and curiosity do not condemn a woman to objectivity, or is it about providing comprehensive sexual education to young girls and boys? Is it simply about respecting privacy? Is it all of this?

Dr. Lara Karaian: Could you repeat the first part of the question? I made a half-note on it.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: The first part....

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You only have about a minute to answer. Sorry.

Dr. Lara Karaian: I believe I remember enough.

What I see is that there has always been a panic about the developments of new technologies as they intersect with sexuality and in particular young people's sexuality. We have seen this panic with the telegraph, the phone, and with all sorts of different new developments about making women's sexuality more visible and more accessible, and then also less moored to traditional notions of sexuality.

I do believe this development of technology may have shifted the visibility of young people's sexuality more than some of those previous technologies. I believe that fears of hypersexualization are a bit of a moral panic. That is my position on hypersexualization.

I do believe that part of—

Mrs. Eva Nassif: What would you suggest?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): The minute is up.

Dr. Lara Karaian: I do believe in education.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

Dr. Lara Karaian: I mean education that is not anti-sex and not abstinence.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We're going to go to Ms. Vecchio for six minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thanks very much to both of you for coming in. Either of you can answer any of the questions.

I'm coming here as not only a parliamentarian but as a mother of an 18-year-old and a 19-year-old, and I'll be honest: when I look at my daughter, it is fearful. I wish I looked like my daughter some days, but as a parent—you're going to hear from me as a mom—I am concerned about sexting. When I think about myself growing up in the 1980s, if I wanted a photograph of myself, then it was going to have to be published at Maxwell's—Maxwell's is in St. Thomas—and it was going to have to be done at a photographer's. They'd have to create those images, whereas now the ability to take a photograph of yourself of a sexual nature and text it is an immediate thing.

One of my concerns—and I recognize we're talking about norms—as a parent is about creating that as a norm, because I had a standard for myself in which I wanted to not be embarrassed. I recognize that we want to have a positive sexual growth and I believe in that, but I also think that sometimes normalizing it can also have its own issues, and there has to be a moral code on this.

As a parent, I think a lot of the education starts at home. If we're going to talk about homophobia and things like that, then we have to recognize the conversations we have at the dinner table are what our children are learning first before they go off to school.

As two specialists in these areas, what is the message that we as parents and parliamentarians are supposed to be sharing with our youth? What is normal, and what is not normal? I would not feel comfortable saying that sexting is appropriate.

● (1620)

Dr. Shaheen Shariff: Should I take this?

Dr. Lara Karaian: Go ahead, please.

Dr. Shaheen Shariff: Some of the research we did with seven-year-olds to nine-year-olds showed that they talked about sexting being common at that age. It is already normalized. It's not normalization by adults; it's normalization by the kids themselves, within their social spheres. As Lara said, a lot of it occurs as the hormones start raging and as they become teenagers. Young people are experimenting sexually, but the forum has changed for this kind of experimentation.

Somebody else, and I can't remember who it was, described it as flirty fun. This has almost replaced being in the back seat of a car. The concern comes when there's non-consensual distribution. Consensual sexting seems to be okay as long as there is no assault or rape that's filmed, posted online, and then distributed, or when it's done without consent.

Raising awareness among these young people of all genders is the best way to go. What we're doing—and I had said that I would discuss some of this in the question time—is using arts and social media sectors, as well as news media, to work with students to develop critical analysis of news media stories about sexting and non-consensual distribution of intimate images with students involved. We're engaging them in discussions, watching videotapes of situations that can occur, discussing where they might cross the line to where it could become illegal and could become harmful, and getting the dialogue going from a critical perspective.

There's a need for critical legal literacy among the public as well as in the schools. There's a need among parents, among teachers, and among policy-makers at all levels, in the schools and at the university levels. That's one, and critical media literacy is another. Engaging social media intermediaries like Facebook and others—all of these people—is important.

Dr. Lara Karaian: May I add briefly?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Please do.

Dr. Lara Karaian: Adopting a sext-positive perspective is not one that necessarily says that all sex is good all the time. When I talk to young people, really what it's educating about is that whatever moral code works for you is good, as long as it's consensual and as long as it's not doing any harm.

If you want to abstain from sex for your entire life and if that's what you want to teach or if that's what your child wants to do because they're getting these messages and they believe those messages are great, that's fine. There are lots of people who want to abstain. There are lots of people who use sexting in the place of physical sexual contact because they think it's safer and less risky, but it's recognizing also that promiscuity or non-monogamy, if it's done safely, is also a valid moral judgment, I would say.

When we put forward a sex-positive framework to young people, it's really about giving them those choices, and also to recognize that the moral codes are very distinct to the individuals. The Muslim girls I spoke to in my focus groups would say, “Look, the most pressure I get is from people telling me to take my headdress off, and I don't want to because of my beliefs and my way of moving through the world. That's the biggest threat to me”, so that's that.

● (1625)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Benson, for six minutes.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Thank you, Ms. Shariff and Ms. Karaian, for great presentations and lots to think about.

I'll try to go through a couple of questions about where we've positioned the conversation in what appears, from my point of view —and I'm not following my notes—to be a big piece.

What I'd like both of you to talk about a little bit is, if we're looking at a large policy piece for the government around gender-based violence, what part of what you're talking about today would fit into that framework? I think some of it was in the earlier part of both your presentations when you started talking about the intersectoral nature.

I would ask you to comment on your direction to the committee about where to focus on what seems to be a very.... We could go all the way back to positive education and whatnot, and we can talk about the other end of it when you were talking about the Stanford case. Could you give us some advice about where to focus our resources to be able to move to a better place on this issue, for both children and ourselves, I guess?

Dr. Shaheen Shariff: I'll start.

I think one area to focus on would be more awareness of the intersectionalities. That is sometimes overlooked because we tend to see things as black and white. It is a continuum, as Sherene Razack said many years ago, of intersecting and interlocking systems in which certain people are oppressed because of various characteristics.

In terms of the policy frameworks, I've already mentioned there needs to be more attention to bringing the various sectors together with academics. There is a lack of empirical research, so there needs to be support for increased empirical research, especially when you look at what's happening in universities and what's happening in schools. There needs to be more of a focus on evidence-based research that will address some of this, that will better inform policy, that will better inform curriculum programs, and that will engage young people and incorporate their voices, their concerns, and their perspectives, based on their norms, into policy on sexual violence as well as into curriculum.

There are many creative ways of doing this. One way that we're doing it is by bringing arts, theatre companies, and art galleries to provide spaces where girls and women can feel free to dialogue. That space can be within institutions, but it can also be attended at exhibits, or any art or cultural products—

Ms. Sheri Benson: I'm going to interrupt because I'm going to ask Ms. Karaian to continue.

I'm hearing you say there is a need to be able to have more support and funding and evidence-based research so when we start to intervene in a policy area, we are not simply throwing good money after bad. You end up in the wrong place, getting the least impact.

Since my time is limited—

● (1630)

Dr. Shaheen Shariff: Sorry, but if I can just finish my sentence, we have to engage public dialogue. One way of doing it is through combined curriculum initiatives that involve the public sector as well.

Ms. Sheri Benson: I see what you're saying.

Dr. Lara Karaian: I completely support Shaheen's perspective.

I would say to take the money out of prisons and put it into education. You just need to look at the report from the most recent— and I can never remember the name of the individual who oversees prisons—

Pardon me?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): It is Howard Sapers.

Dr. Lara Karaian: Howard Sapers, but there was a report recently, and I can't remember.

Our statistics are upsetting. The number of women is growing at a disgusting rate, and the number of indigenous women in particular is growing, as is the criminalization of young people. If you make a policy document, take the money out of criminalization and prisons and courts and put it into education and research.

If we are maintaining intersectionality at the heart of the analysis, we are asking for us to not only recognize how intersectionality factors into who experiences sexual violence but also who gets criminalized, which is also very much a gendered, racialized, classed process, and that does not do us any good in what our policies want to achieve.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You have 15 seconds left.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Thank you, Chair. That's fine.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Okay. We're going to go on to Ms. Ludwig.

Dr. Shaheen Shariff: Can I just have...?

A voice: You can have 15 seconds.

Dr. Shaheen Shariff: There's another way of looking at the legal aspects. We could move from a criminal justice framework, which has been shown to be less effective, to a human rights and legal pluralism perspective to look at how educational institutions apply university administrative laws within human rights frameworks, for example, and that is one way that our law faculty especially is going.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Go ahead, Ms. Ludwig.

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you for your excellent presentations.

In terms of university rape culture—I'll start with that area—you've suggested looking at changing the curriculum. Would you recommend going back a step further and when faculties are setting their own degrees, or in the case of the K-to-12 system, when people are being trained to be teachers, that this curriculum also be changed? The people who have the first one-on-one encounters are our K-to-12 teachers, and then at universities I know from teaching at a university for a long time that faculty training is voluntary. What are some of the recommendations that you might offer there?

Dr. Shaheen Shariff: Thank you for your question.

The difficulty is that it's a catch-22. There's a real need for education of teachers, absolutely. Our teacher education programs lack some of this knowledge, but it's often difficult to even get legal literacy and critical media literacy into programs at the university level, at the teacher preparation level. They're inconsistent. It depends on who is teaching it and the expertise that's brought with it.

If we can work toward more compulsory courses in these areas and policy courses as well—policy development courses that incorporate some of these issues of intersectionality, integrated courses that bring in multidisciplinary perspectives in law and education and policy.... I developed a policy course for education, law, and policy students, and it was filled with law students because they didn't get that kind of course. Right now our dentistry faculty has asked me to develop a course on online social responsibility for dental students, compulsory from year one to year four, because dentistry students don't get this kind of education at all.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: If I could take the position of a university professor, I would just add that to have a student take one awareness course has always been my personal challenge with a women's studies program. How could we better help faculty integrate these elements into the curriculum so it becomes more of a culture in all courses?

● (1635)

Dr. Shaheen Shariff: You're absolutely right. For example, for dentistry, it's going to be the core curriculum with modules incorporated. Yes, absolutely, I think you're right. It has to be integrated throughout every aspect of the curriculum, and that includes school curricula as well. You're right that once the teachers are prepared at the university level, then they can take it further into the schools.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Thank you.

My next question is for both of you.

Continuing on with the rape culture at universities, certainly we have a challenge in Canada because universities and colleges are not mandated to report them. In fact, the internal administration culture of some universities says that there isn't necessarily a positive outcome for one university to be reporting when 99% of other universities are not reporting.

I have two questions.

First, how can we, as federal legislators, mandate reporting for all universities? Second, in terms of slut-shaming—and Laura also mentioned the whore culture—so often we hear about boys who are sharing these images. What about the cases, as well, of girls who are also sharing images of other girls?

Those are my two questions, which I'm sure will take a while to answer.

Thank you.

Dr. Lara Karaian: Can I just say that girls are also sharing pictures of boys a lot, and that boys' images are more likely to be distributed, according to the MediaSmarts studies, which I'm sure will be referenced? That's a very interesting thing to know: that boys' images are more likely to get distributed. Of course, the fact is they don't have the same repercussions, because we don't shame boys' sexuality, or at least some boys' sexuality, in the same way.

Can I just say that, for one thing, there are some people who are questioning the usefulness of the concept of rape culture? That's just to flag that as something to look at as you're moving forward, even though I know that other people are also working with that concept. That line of thinking is just developing.

There's a problem with the fetishization of reporting. Lots of people don't want to report, for many different reasons. I also think that when we have universities trying to have reporting standards that measure up with federal legislation, we have to make sure we're very, very clear about how the definitions on campus meet up with the federal definitions. In the United States in particular, some campuses have definitions that are so broad and sweeping that anything undesired could be caught under a sexual assault rubric, and then be reported, and then inflate numbers. That's not to say that these numbers are inflated; it's just to say that there are issues with language. It needs to be very specific.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That's actually your time. I apologize. I seem to be cutting you off each time you're answering.

Ms. Lara Karaian: That's fine.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That brings us to the end of our first panel.

We're going to suspend for just a few minutes to prepare for the second panel to join us. I want to thank both of our witnesses for being here and sharing their information with us.

● (1635)

(Pause)

● (1640)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We'll get started again with our second panel. I want to thank Matthew Johnson and Jane Bailey for being here. You each have 10 minutes for your presentations, and then we'll go to questions. Do you have a preference on who starts?

Ms. Jane Bailey (Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Matthew will go first.

Mr. Matthew Johnson (Director of Education, MediaSmarts): I'd like to start by thanking the committee for the opportunity to present our research and our resources today.

Since 2001, MediaSmarts has been conducting a research report entitled "Young Canadians in a Wired World". It looks at Canadian students' experiences with networked technology. Most of the data I'll be sharing today come from our most recent quantitative study, which was released in 2014 and surveyed more than 5,000 students from grades 4 to 11 across Canada.

Our quantitative study found that girls are significantly more likely than boys to feel that the Internet is an unsafe place for them and significantly more girls than boys fear that they could be hurt if they talk online to someone they don't know. More girls than boys also feel that their parents are worried that they could get hurt online.

Ironically, all this may prevent girls from developing the ability to manage online risk. Research from the U.K. suggests that more restrictive approaches based on an online safety model produce students who are less able to keep themselves safe and who are generally less confident and capable users of digital technology.

Another reason that girls may not feel safe is surely the frequent and often public attacks on women online. Some cases may be high profile, such as the attacks on critic Anita Sarkeesian after she launched an online campaign to fund a series of videos looking at sexism in video games.

American research has found a rise in online hate material specifically targeting women. Like other forms of hate, this rhetoric can influence the culture of more mainstream spaces.

Online misogyny was not originally connected to what might be thought of as traditional hate groups, such as groups of white supremacists. However, all such groups rely on the same ideologies of hate and appeal in a similar way to youth, particularly boys and young men who feel alienated from society.

Women who aren't public figures also attract online hostility. Over one-third of Canadian students in grades 7 to 11 encounter sexist or racist content online at least once a week. Girls are much more likely than boys to feel hurt when a racist or sexist joke is made at their expense. Boys are much more likely to say that they and their friends don't mean anything by it when they say racist or sexist things online and that they do not speak up against such content because they are usually just joking around.

Overall, girls are somewhat more likely than boys to experience online meanness and cruelty and are more likely to say that it was a serious problem for them.

Sexting is an activity that is actually less gendered than might be expected. Boys and girls are equally likely to send sexts, and there is only a small difference in the number who forward sexts that were created by the sender. There's little evidence that sending sexts is by itself a risky act. For example, one study of American university students found that many of them reported positive experiences, although Australian research suggests that girls are often sent sexts by boys as a form of harassment.

Harm is most likely to occur when sexts are shared or forwarded. Contrary to widespread perceptions that the sharing of sexts is rampant, our research found that it is far from normal behaviour. Of the 24% of students in grades 7 to 11 with cellphone access who have received a sext directly from the sender, just 15%, or 4% of all students in grades 7 to 11 who have cellphones, have forwarded one to someone else.

Those sexts that are forwarded, however, reach a fairly wide audience. One in five students say they have received a sext that was forwarded to them by a third party. Having a sext of oneself forwarded is an event that has particular consequences for girls. Though sexts sent by boys are more likely to be forwarded, there is undoubtedly more social disapproval of girls who send sexts. This may explain why those who do forward sexts don't appear to see it as an ethical issue.

We found a strong connection between household rules and student behaviour. For example, the presence of a household rule on treating others with respect online has a strong association with not engaging in cyberbullying. However, we found no statistically significant relationship between the presence of such a rule and whether or not students forward sexts.

● (1645)

It would seem, therefore, that those students who forward sexts do not see it as an ethical question, or that they don't see the authors of the sexts as deserving of respect.

Girls who send sexts are seen as having transgressed appropriate gender roles and, therefore, having given up the right to expect that their images will not be forwarded or shared. Much of the harm that comes from sexting seems to be related to gender-related double standards that portray girls both as innocent guardians of their sexual innocence and, if they should stray from that role, as being responsible for any consequences they might suffer as a result of their actions. U.K. research has found that these stereotypes are often found even in educational anti-sexting campaigns, showing how poorly considered interventions may cause more harm than good. Addressing this by teaching boys about the importance of consent is key both in terms of requesting a sext and sharing it. American research shows that girls who were coerced or pressured into sending sexts were three times more likely to report a negative outcome.

At MediaSmarts we support intervention strategies based on media and digital literacy. Briefly, this means teaching youth critical thinking and ethical decision-making skills, and educating them about their rights in both online and offline contexts.

With specific reference to cyberviolence against women, our approach includes conducting research to ensure that all of our interventions reflect students' concerns and authentic experiences and to inform youth about the actual rates of behaviours like cyberbullying and sexting; fostering empathy and teaching social-emotional learning skills in online contexts; encouraging youth to think ethically about their online interactions, to respect their own and others' privacy, and to recognize the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships; teaching media literacy skills that enable students to recognize, decode, and confront hate speech, including gender-based hatred, and to question the gender stereotypes that underlie online misogyny at both the individual and community level; focusing on the ethical dimension of sharing sexts, rather than excusing those who share them by blaming the senders; defining media literacy, digital literacy, and digital citizenship in holistic, comprehensive terms, in recognition of the connections between stereotyping, sexualization, healthy relationships, advocacy, ethics, and consent; teaching students about their legal and human rights and how to exercise them; and providing students with practical tools for digital citizenship and activism, both when they witness individual cyberbullying situations and in improving the culture of their online communities.

Thank you.

● (1650)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much. You're well within your 10 minutes. We'll move on to Ms. Bailey.

Ms. Jane Bailey: Thank you very much for inviting me to be here.

My remarks are going to focus on cyberviolence against girls and young women, although, as will become obvious as I proceed, in the seamlessly integrated online/offline world that is inhabited by young people today, distinctions between cyberspace and real space are virtually meaningless. As we know, the consequence of so-called online behaviour can be very real.

My remarks are grounded in the work that I've been doing for 15 years on the intersections of law, technology, and equality, and in particular the eGirls Project, which I co-led with Valerie Steeves until 2014, and the work of the eQuality Project, which I currently co-lead with Dr. Steeves, and for which we're proud to have MediaSmarts as a partner organization.

I'm also a member of the national steering committee of the National Association of Women and the Law.

The eGirls Project itself focused on girls' and women's experiences with online social media. In it, we interviewed girls aged 15 to 17 and 18 to 22 to ask them how their perceptions of their online lives lined up with policy-makers' solutions for online issues for children and to find out what they would want policy-makers to know about what life was like for a girl online.

Of course, technologically facilitated harassment and violence surfaced in those conversations, but so too did their concerns around mediatized stereotyping; privacy; the intense scrutiny girls find themselves under online; and corporate policies, practices, and structures that compromise their capacity to participate as equals online and off. It's this latter issue that's led us to the eQuality Project.

The eQuality Project is focused on the way that online behavioural targeting actually shapes the online environment that young people inhabit and the degree to which it sets young people up for conflict and harassment, particularly youth from diverse and intersecting equality-seeking communities. One of our current initiatives is to review and assess the efficacy of criminal law responses by looking at Canadian case law on technologically facilitated violence against women and girls.

I had originally intended to talk about three things, but I'm only going to talk about two. The first is a pet peeve of mine: why the term “cyberbullying” has to be treated with caution. The second is what needs to be done based on lessons learned from the eGirls Project participants.

The term “cyberbullying” has to be treated with caution because its generic nature just too easily whitewashes issues of discrimination and violence, which require tailored responses beyond punishing individual children or even teaching them how to properly use technology.

Research shows that young people who are perceived as different, whether because of ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or perceived disability or disability, are at greater risk of being bullied and cyberbullied. Similarly, as we've heard, girls and young women are more likely to be targeted by technologically facilitated sexual violence. In a sexist society, one form of that, the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, leaves women and girls open to humiliation, embarrassment, and reputational ruin for expressing their sexuality, for exposing their bodies, or even for others' decisions to expose their bodies, which is perhaps the most troubling of all, despite superficially conflicting messages that tell girls and women that social success depends upon emulating a stereotypical, heteronormative version of “sexy”. I put “sexy” in quotes. I call that flip-top sexuality. I don't think it has anything to do with sex whatsoever.

To the extent that cyberbullying, then, as a term, suggests somehow random targeting or random effects, I think the term has to be approached with caution, in particular when we're talking about women and girls. Otherwise we're going to miss root causes, such as misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and racism, that actually demand redress. We can't fix the problem by treating the symptoms.

● (1655)

The second point I want to talk about is what needs to be done. What did we learn from the eGirls' eQuality project participants?

First, consult directly with diverse groups of girls and young women and recognize the expertise of community organizations working against violence against women and in support of survivors. We cannot assume that adults' perceptions of the problems of girls and young women mesh with their own perceptions and experiences.

For example, Canadian federal public policy dialogue around children and technology has placed significant emphasis on the risk of unknown sexual predators online. The eGirls project participants indicated some concern about unknown sexual predators online, especially with respect to their younger siblings and relations; however, they demonstrated far more concern about the impact of the widespread availability and scrutiny of data relating to them and the ways in which the online environment exposed them to what they perceived as the risk of reputational ruin at the age of 12. Girls and young women may be equally at risk—if not more—of technologically facilitated violence by those they know than by strangers. For anyone working in the violence-against-women community, we've known this for a long time about sexual violence in general.

Second, recognize technologically facilitated violence against women and girls as an equality-based human rights issue and proactively address root causes rather than focusing solely on criminal law responses.

I'm a lawyer. I'm the first person to say that individual perpetrators should be held responsible for their actions, and I part company with any suggestion that an individual's unilateral decision to display his girlfriend's naked picture on a pornography site is an expression of sexuality that we ought to be giving much merit to or concern for, or that a charge in that case is necessarily wrong in those kinds of circumstances. Individual perpetrators do have to be held responsible for their actions, particularly where they're taken unilaterally.

Meaningfully addressing the disproportionate targeting of girls and young women for sexualized cyberviolence, though, requires nothing short of social transformation. That's what it's about. As a friend of mine said, “Yes, you're talking about ending the patriarchy, so good luck.” That's okay. That's what we're talking about: ending the patriarchy.

We have to address misogyny, racism, homophobia, and other intersecting oppressions that have been used as tools to keep women down, to silence them, and to keep them out of the public sphere. In the online context, they are preventing girls and young women from participating as equals. Some eGirls project participants felt it would be particularly important to address discrimination and prejudice through educational measures to combat these forms of oppression, as well as to address heterosexist stereotyping that privileges thin, white representations of femininity and sexuality that were a prominent part of the advertising they were targeted with in online social spaces.

Third, focus on the role that corporations play in structuring online interactions to compel data disclosure and make privacy protection difficult, instead of focusing on telling girls and young women what not to do. Too often, policy approaches focus on reactive responses that result in blaming those attacked for having disclosed too much and that subject girls and young women who have been targeted to further monitoring and surveillance by parents and other adults. The eGirls project participants felt that policy-makers should give girls in particular a break. That's a quote. “Give girls a break,” they said, and pay more attention to corporate practices and policies that compromise their ability to negotiate privacy in networked spaces.

Fourth, provide more support for girls and young women who have been targeted by technologically facilitated violence. The eGirls project participants felt there was too little focus on providing support and encouragement for targets of online abuse. Policy-makers need to make sure that community organizations working to combat violence against women and girls and to support survivors and schools dealing with these issues have adequate funding to meaningfully address these needs.

Fifthand last is again another pet peeve of mine: do not make unnecessary expansion of police power the price of addressing technologically facilitated violence against women and girls.

● (1700)

One of our project participants lamented that protections from online predation for girls and women were too often associated with unnecessary expansion of police surveillance powers. Once again we saw with the passage of Bill C-13 that the censure of non-consensual distribution of intimate images came at the cost of expanded police powers that were in absolutely no way limited to addressing violence against women and girls.

In conclusion, it's time for adults to take responsibility for economic and social policy decisions that have resulted in the seamlessly integrated online/offline world our children now inhabit.

I'm happy to summarize that in the answer period, if I can.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

Our first questions will come from Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): I'll be sharing my time with Ms. Sahota.

Thank you very much for being here.

I'd like to pick up on that last point about surveillance, juxtaposing that with the fact that it seems there is a double standard. There's an inequality, almost a victim-blaming, for young girls. I was struck by the statistic earlier that more boys' images are being forwarded, but the impact on girls is stronger—the shame, the humiliation, the worry about reputation.

Can you elaborate a little bit on that aspect of it? As well, what happens if that then gets reinforced in things like the anti-sexting campaigns or the surveillance or the police? How can that actually reinforce the problem?

Ms. Jane Bailey: First, MediaSmarts' results with respect to the sharing of images were obviously reflective of a widespread study. There's also data with respect to women showing that, in one study, 90% of those who had complained of non-consensual distribution were women. I think the jury is still out in terms of exactly.... Maybe with respect to boys and girls in Canada this is obviously what the statistics tell us, but other statistics are telling us different things.

In terms of the impact, it's obviously a reflection of the double standard, as has been talked about. An image of a naked girl is perceived as a source of shame. A “dick pic” of a guy is funny, or it may be cool, unless there is some association of it with an allegation about his manhood. We sell sexuality as a sign of manhood for boys, something to be proud of, but as something for girls to be ashamed of. In that regard, what Lara was talking about earlier is very reflective.

I don't know, Matthew, if you want to say something.

Mr. Matthew Johnson: I think with regard to that 90%, what's important to remember is that in our statistics, it was simply a question of whether a photo had been forwarded and not whether it was consensual or not. It was not whether the person reporting it had any issue with it.

There's very little quantitative data worldwide on forwarding. Most if it has focused on consequences rather than simple numbers. One of the issues with having just quantitative data to work with is that we're always looking at research done mostly by other people and other organizations to try to put it into context.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Go ahead, Ms. Sahota.

● (1705)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Johnson, at the beginning of your presentation you that often cyberbullying or cyberviolence can be seen as young people being overly sensitive: you know, it's just a joke, and you should be able to hang with the boys and take it or whatever. It still happens in adulthood too, to some degree.

Can you define for me what cyberbullying and cyberviolence actually consist of? The previous panel cited a very interesting survey about what people perceived as being a violation of someone's rights and what people didn't perceive as being a violation. I'd like your expert opinion on what you think constitutes cyberbullying and cyberviolence and what the differences are between the two.

Mr. Matthew Johnson: Both of those are really complicated notions to unpack. In fact, we were careful in our questionnaire not to use the term “cyberbullying” because we have a strong sense, from American research, that this is not a term that has meaning for youth. It's something they see adults using. They perceive it as something that either younger kids do or other kids do, but not themselves.

We asked about two things. We asked about meanness and cruelty online—that was one question—and we asked about making threats online, threats of physical harm.

We divided meanness and cruelty further into a number of methods: name-calling; rumour-spreading; sharing an embarrassing photo or video, which could include sharing a sext, although it had a broader definition than that; sexual harassment, which again could include sending a sext, as I mentioned; making fun of someone's race, religion, or ethnicity; making fun of someone's sexual orientation; harassing someone in an online game; and we also just had an “other” catch-all.

There are certainly other forms that we didn't ask about. We know, for instance, that online relationship abuse is a significant issue, for the simple reason that relationship abuse is a simple issue and young people carry out their social lives online as much as offline.

Finding a specific definition may not be really valuable. What is more important to us is how young people see it ethically, particularly the reasons that they choose either to ignore it or to approve of it, or even to support it.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Ms. Bailey, you were saying—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That's actually your time, I'm sorry.

Ms. Harder is next.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

First of all, I want to thank each of you for coming and taking the time to present to us today. I believe the information you're providing us with is very helpful in terms of this study, so thank you so much for your time.

My first question is directed to Mr. Johnson, but I also invite you to speak to it as well, Ms. Bailey.

Mr. Johnson, I understand that with your group, MediaSmarts, one of the things you do is create products for parents. Am I understanding that correctly?

Mr. Matthew Johnson: Yes, that's right.

Ms. Rachael Harder: You mentioned that only about 10% of youth surveyed have actually sexted.

Mr. Matthew Johnson: It's slightly lower. It's roughly 8%. That's 8% of those students who had access to a cellphone in grades 7 through 11.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay. I guess what I'm wondering—and my question could go to both of you—is if you can give me a really brief background with regard to the methodology used for that study.

Mr. Matthew Johnson: You can actually find the methodology in our research, which is available online. All of our research and 95% of our teacher, parent, and youth resources are available for free on our website online, so I won't go into it in too much detail.

Essentially it was conducted in classrooms. It was a survey. For consistency, we go as much as possible back to the same schools each time we do an iteration of this survey. We took every step possible to guarantee anonymity to the students, so they wouldn't have to worry about being associated with the data. Beyond that, it was a simple questionnaire.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Good.

Mostly the anonymity was what I wanted to know about and have on the record, so that's very helpful. Thank you.

With regard to parent involvement, the previous panel talked a lot about perhaps needing to integrate a course into our education system. I can certainly see some value to that. However, I'm personally of the opinion that education starts in the home.

We know that access to pornography is starting at a younger age. Health Canada tells us that pornography is directly related to health effects in young people and in adults as well, so we know there are some negative repercussions there.

Nevertheless, with regard to education beginning in the home, I'm wondering if you guys can comment on the role parents might have with regard to mitigating the risk of sexual exploitation or violence with regard to cyberspace, both from the side of the person who is the perpetrator, in this case, and from the side of the individual who is sharing their image. Is there a role for parents to play?

● (1710)

Mr. Matthew Johnson: I would simply say yes.

Obviously we do provide a lot of resources for parents. Parents and teachers are our two main audiences, as well as youth through them.

We think it's really important to provide parents with accurate information, which is why the research is so important. It's to provide parents with practical tools, which is one of the reasons we did our research specifically on the effect of household rules, for instance; and to make sure parents don't approach the issue with fear.

We did a focus group with parents. In our research with parents, we found that they felt tremendous—and often misplaced—fear. They were worried about things that were genuinely low-risk. Also, this fear was driving them away from discussing the issues with their youth, which we know is the most effective approach, and towards conducting surveillance of youth, which we know is at best neutral and has at times negative effects on youth safety and youth agency.

It's really important to encourage parents to talk to their kids, to take a positive approach, to be aware of the legitimate and genuine risks as well as to be involved in setting limits, transmitting their values to their kids, and providing them with practical tools for what to do when things go wrong.

Ms. Jane Bailey: I think there are two things. We have to teach girls that it's okay to want to have sex and to be sexual, because it is. Also, we have to teach boys that there needs to be respect for the sexual autonomy of others.

Maybe there are three things. The third thing is that we have to address gender stereotyping. We have to deconstruct the myth that to be a man, you have to dominate a woman and that violence is sex. We have to give those tools to our kids and we have to give them those freedoms. If we did that, non-consensual distribution would be completely robbed of its fire, because it would be like, “Go ahead and post it. I don't care. Who cares? Nobody cares. Girls get naked sometimes. Big deal.”

That's the future I'm looking for, and I think parents can play an active role in achieving it. However, I think leaving it to parents is not enough. I do think formal education, starting in junior kindergarten, is where we need to go.

Mr. Matthew Johnson: I should point out that our digital literacy resources as well as our media literacy resources do go from kindergarten to grade 12. What Professor Bailey said shows why media literacy is an essential element.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You have 20 seconds.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I have a quick follow-up.

I totally appreciate what you guys are saying. Thank you very much.

How do we push information out to parents? What's our vehicle?

Ms. Jane Bailey: This is one of the questions for the eQuality Project. One way we are doing that is to have a partnership, and our partnership includes an organization whose community of service is family. It's the Vanier Institute for the Family.

This is a partnership that's trying to forge links between amazing organizations like MediaSmarts, which knows better than anybody how to put together digital and ethical literacy material for kids, and then help them integrate with the Vanier Institute for the Family, which knows the kinds of stuff families need and the sorts of things families are looking for to create communities and use expertise—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That was a long 15 seconds.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I didn't want to cut you off.

Ms. Benson is next.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Thank you both for being here.

I want to reiterate comments from other committee members here. In particular, I appreciate the view you and other speakers have brought, giving us a perspective from young people. I see just by some of our questions that it's an adult view of a world for children. They have a different perspective and have grown up—some of us are younger than others here—in a different place, so I really appreciate that both of you have brought that view, those voices of kids, from the work you've done together.

We heard from the other speaker as well that when we start to treat children as objects and start using words like “cyber” and create something new, in fact we're just confusing things in a way.

I'd like both of you to comment on a more general piece.

The other speakers spoke as well about the importance of using a lens that looks at the intersection of sexism, classism, and racism within this particular subject. It's important to have that lens, but I'm wondering how this fits into the overall narrative when we look at gender-based violence. Do you feel it's detracting or adding when we use terms like “cyberviolence” and “date culture”? From my point of view, it seems to kind of get us off track. It's almost as though it puts in barriers to what the real issue is. My concern is that we'll start to implement interventions and we'll have missed the point.

I'd like your general comments, Jane and Matthew.

● (1715)

Ms. Jane Bailey: That's always my worry and that's why I talked about cyberbullying first. You could say that about a lot of words and phrases that we use, but I don't think of intersectionality in that category at all.

Finding solutions that are workable for people depends on knowing what their life situation is. That life situation can be affected by multiple imposed or chosen identity markers. I don't think that approach in particular gets us off track. I think that sort of takes us exactly where we want to go.

At the core of this stuff to me is equality and inequality. It all comes back to that. Whether it's technologically facilitated violence against women or not, equality is the underlying theme.

Mr. Matthew Johnson: I think it's always dangerous or risky to get hung up on buzzwords, but I would have to echo what Professor Bailey said. We do know. We know from a great deal of research that some youth are more at risk of being victims of cyberviolence of various kinds and also suffer more harm. In most cases, these are youth who are marginalized or disadvantaged in various ways—youth with disabilities, gay or GLBTQ or questioning youth, low-income youth, aboriginal youth.

We do have to recognize this. That is again why a comprehensive, holistic approach is important and why digital literacy has to be connected to media literacy. Just as we need to question our ideas of masculinity, which frequently pressure boys to share sex they receive or encourage them to ask for sex or permit them to feel that it's okay, we have to question our ideas of femininity and we have to question all of our ideas, which in many cases are either inspired by or reflected in the media representations that we consume.

● (1720)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You have about 45 seconds.

Ms. Sheri Benson: I will ask each of you to leave us with one or two comments about what you feel is the most important thing we should take away from what you've brought to our conversation today. It's an easy question to ask, but....

Ms. Jane Bailey: Here's the thing. Apart from discrimination, discrimination, discrimination, equality, I really think that we have treated corporate enterprises in the online environment with a set of kid gloves and allowed them to make a lot of decisions very privately that have a huge impact on our public order and that are having a huge impact on our kids. Online behavioural targeting is one of those.

To try to understand how those private decisions are shaping the environment that kids are socializing in I think is critical. I think there is certainly a role for investigation and research, and potentially a role for regulation. That came from the girls who we talked to. They were aware of the way that they were being targeted and the way their communications were being pushed.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I'm going to have to end that there.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Can Matthew just say one too?

Mr. Matthew Johnson: It shows we need comprehensive digital literacy education, with all of the elements that I've described earlier, in every classroom for every student from kindergarten through grade 12, and ideally beyond.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I'm glad I let you have that chance.

Mr. Fraser is next.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thanks very much to both of you for being here, and to our previous witnesses as well.

This has been a learning experience for me, and I'm sure for many others in the room as well. You've made some excellent points.

I think, Ms. Bailey, you commented earlier in your remarks that the distinction between the cyberworld and the real world is becoming more and more meaningless because things are felt in the world that we live in largely as a result of social attitudes. I agree that smashing the patriarchy is not too ambitious a goal. I think we can pursue that.

Ms. Jane Bailey: Let's start today.

Mr. Sean Fraser: That's right.

Some of the suggestions you've made are great, whether it's Mr. Johnson promoting media and digital literacy or whether it's looking at corporate practices. What we're trying to do with this study is to recommend changes to the federal government that will actually bring about these suggestions that you've made.

I'll leave this one to the experts and ask you an open-ended question. How would you suggest the federal government achieve the wonderful suggestions that you have made?

Mr. Matthew Johnson: First of all, fund research.

It's not only our research that's worth funding; there is lots of great research going on.

A number of iterations of our research received federal funding, but it's not just original research that we need: we also need to have evaluations of interventions. That's an area where it's very difficult to find funding. We heard earlier about how interventions can do more harm than good, so we need to find out which interventions are working and which ones aren't.

The federal government can change the public discussion on issues like cyberbullying, online safety, and sexting. They can make it more about ethics and less about fear. They can help in promoting resources and providing resources to the provinces for use in the K-12 sector, but there are also any number of sectors that are increasingly becoming connected. There's the health sector, for instance, and the need to provide material for health professionals. We're working more and more with health professionals on these issues. There are a lot of sectors where the federal government can play a role in getting the news out and getting resources to people who need them.

Ms. Jane Bailey: I'd like to echo that last statement and say that having organizations that deal with violence against women is critical. Studies have shown that having strong feminist grassroots organizations is critical to women's equality. Those organizations, particularly those working in the context of sexual violence and domestic abuse, are confronting all kinds of issues with respect to this particular issue of technologically facilitated violence.

That's a sector that badly needs resources, and it's providing the kind of support to victimized women and children that the eGirls Project participants were talking about. Support survivors and give money and funding to organizations to support survivors.

● (1725)

Mr. Sean Fraser: Are you suggesting giving more money in general to these organizations for support for survivors, or specifically to those dealing with victims of cybersexual violence?

Ms. Jane Bailey: Even in looking at the criminal case law, research is showing that technologically facilitated violence is creeping in. Technologically facilitated violence by itself is prosecuted relatively infrequently. It's often encased in a situation of relationship abuse or domestic abuse, so the idea that you could parse it out again would not be consistent with the lived reality of how these issues are arising.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Shifting to criminal violence or case law, as the case may be, I'm curious if you have thoughts on how we could be better supporting either law enforcement or the criminal justice process to deal with cases of cyberviolence.

I'm from Nova Scotia. We had quite a public case at the Dalhousie dentistry school, and the public outcry over taking the restorative justice approach was mind-boggling to me. Can you comment on criminalization versus a restorative justice approach, and if there's time, on what extra resources law enforcement could have to prevent victims of not just cyberviolence, but violence as a whole?

Ms. Jane Bailey: We always have to be cautious of restorative justice approaches in the context of abuses of power, where there is a power imbalance and violence is perpetrated against women because they're women. I understand why that concern was raised.

It's not to say that it doesn't work; it's to say that we always have to be cautious about those approaches and we have to be very confident that the people who are facilitating those remedies know exactly what they're doing and know how to mediate conflict and power imbalance in that context.

In terms of money for law enforcement, a lot of education in schools is being done by police officers, which is great. I understand police officers are looking to play a preventive role instead of playing a reactive role all the time. At some stage, though, the delivery of the message from someone in a uniform who has the capacity to arrest someone and throw them in jail is not necessarily the way to promote the kind of dialogue that we might be looking for.

However, studies like those by Holly Johnson around sexual violence specifically demonstrate that there does need to be some kind of training around issues of sexual violence and cybersexual violence in addition.

I think the addition of a non-consensual distribution provision itself has opened up all kinds of possibilities for law enforcement to lay charges in situations where it either wasn't possible before or it would have been difficult, but I don't think law enforcement would necessarily be the way that I would go.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thanks very much.

Is that my time?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We've gone to six minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser: No, that's fine.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We've got a couple of minutes. Ms. Harder, do you have any additional questions for us to finish this off?

Ms. Rachael Harder: Sure.

Knowing that there's limited time, I'm wondering if you can comment briefly on pornography's impact on young people with regard to their perception of sexting and other forms of cyberviolence that might take place.

Mr. Matthew Johnson: I'm not aware of any quantitative research specifically relating to pornography and sexting. There's certainly qualitative research that suggests a strong connection.

Quantitatively, it is clear that pornography and, in general, sexualized media have a strong influence on how youth view sex and sexuality. Connections have been drawn between pornography and acceptance of rape myths, but a lot of this is not restricted to pornography. A lot of the evidence has shown that you get the same effects from any kind of sexualized media, and that it is not the sexuality, not the sexual element of pornography, that is the problem, but the stereotyped and, in particular, one might say patriarchal forms of sexuality that are on display in so many forms of sexualized media—and that again is why media literacy is an essential partner to digital literacy in addressing these issues.

● (1730)

Ms. Rachael Harder: May I ask a point of clarification? When you say “patriarchal”, are you talking about violence against women, basically, demonstrated by men?

Mr. Matthew Johnson: I didn't mean violence necessarily, but certainly a male-oriented vision of sexuality in which men are subjects and women are objects and porn is all about men's pleasure.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Domination—

Mr. Matthew Johnson: It's not just porn. There are many examples of this stereotyped sexuality in all kinds of media that youth and adults consume.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Go ahead, Ms. Bailey, with a quick response. We're wrapping up at 5:30.

Ms. Jane Bailey: Years ago, Catharine MacKinnon was involved in the porn wars, but no one at the time could have predicted the extent of the infiltration of sexualized violence across culture. Rape culture, I think, is what Professor Shariff is talking about—the equation of sex and violence. It's now so massive that it's not really about an industry anymore, but about a culture.

That's where the work needs to be done. There's all kinds of messaging that's detrimental to women, and that should be enough for us to do something about it, but it's also detrimental to men. These stereotypes limit who people can be, and that's not freedom.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you both for sharing your knowledge with us today.

To the committee, I want to say that this could be our last meeting. If so, I want to tell you what a pleasure it is to work with you; if not, we can just say all that again on Tuesday.

I also want to commend you on the great job that everyone did on this study, and on the press conference. It was just a delight to be part of it.

My thanks to our witnesses.

With that, we're adjourned.