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Meaning Associated with Experiences of Cyberbullying: Cyber Victimization within the Netflix Series 13 Reasons Why

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Abstract

The cultural dynamics carrying with them the meaning of crime is foundational to the theory of cultural criminology. According to cultural criminologists, emphasis on meaning of action is found within the very dynamics of culture and society, which is also produced by those within that culture. Thus, when it comes to cyberbullying, questions ought to be raised regarding the inherent meaning of such experiences, particularly for those who have been victimized. This is important because cyberbullying has become a prominent phenomenon among contemporary young people. By focusing on the concept of meaning, various aspects of cyberbullying victimization are uncovered where the inherent cultural meaning of the act(s) of cyberbullying cannot go unnoticed – mainly through the ways outcomes of victimization are portrayed and understood. To explore this, I conducted a qualitative media analysis on the Netflix series 13 Reasons Why. The aim of the study was to reveal the meaning constructed by the main cyber victim, Hannah Baker, who experiences cyberbullying alongside other social issues. Through this analysis it is revealed how meaning becomes a critical, central theme in the development of cyberbullying and to understand victimization, which draws connections to and advances the tenants of cultural criminology.

Keywords: 13 Reasons Why, Cyberbullying, Cultural criminology, Meaning, Victimization.

Introduction

“Welcome to your tape” (Incaprera, 2017) were the four daunting words heard across Netflix viewers’ screens when another individual who influenced Hannah Baker’s victimization was exposed on the tapes she recorded prior to her suicide. *13 Reasons Why*, based on the novel by Jay Asher (2007), is arguably a cultural identifier among the recent generation of young people, like *Mean Girls* (Messick & Waters, 2004) at an earlier

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point in time, because it achieved popularity among both current and previous generations of young people as well as their parent and other adults – they all viewed the series, read the novel, or both. For many, there was at least one point of connectivity or relatability with the character of Hannah Baker, the star of the book and series (Gross, 2017; Lynn, 2017). For example, in a blog post Cherisse Dickens (2017) opens up about the thirteen reasons why she could relate to Hannah Baker – she says “*13 Reasons Why has opened many people’s eyes, but for me it was like watching my life on a screen.*” Here, Dickens discusses her own experiences of cyberbullying, reaching out for help, journaling her life experiences and their impact, and her attempted suicide as a last resort for coping. However, even when they themselves did not directly relate to Hannah’s character, young people often knew someone who could – they knew of stories of cyber victims, echoing similar types of experiences of victimization from cyberbullying or another component of Hannah’s story (Dickens, 2017; Gross, 2017; Lynn, 2017). At the same time, it may not just have been Hannah that young people related to – many may have also been able to relate to other characters within the series as they think or reflect on their own actions and the impact they have had on other people, much like the characters did when they each listened to their tape (Gross, 2017). The reason for such relatability was because of the vast array of social issues depicted within the series – two of the most prominent were bullying and cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is generally understood as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). However, definitions have continued to evolve and expand as the dangers of cyberbullying intensify (Yang & Grinshteyn, 2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2018; Adorjan & Riccardelli, 2019). As a result, scholars from a range of disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, media studies, and socio-legal studies, have explored and analyzed various aspects of cyberbullying where research has provided valuable insights into cyberbullying relative to the outcomes for cyber victims, perspectives to their experiences, and the harms and risks faced upon victimization (Baldry, Farrington, & Sorrentino, 2015; Daine, Hawton, Singaravelu, Stewart, Simkin, & Montgomery, 2013; Haynes & Robinson, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Holt, Fitzgerald, Bossler, Chee, & Ng, 2016; Peker, 2015; Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009). However, research falls short when discussing cyberbullying relative to the discipline of criminology. Despite some attempts to react to the harms and risks posed to cyber victims (Canadian Bar Association, 2014; Coburn, Connolly, & Roesch, 2015; Deschamps et al., 2016; Williams, Edwards, Housley, Burnap, Rana, Avis, Morgan, & Sloan, 2013; Yu & Rose, 2017), this omission is likely because of immense variation in the treatment of cyberbullying under various laws and policies, which are sometimes unsure handle the act(s) of cyberbullying, particularly because of the variation in what cyberbullying looks like and complexity of gauging cyber victimization (Coburn et al., 2015; Deschamps et al., 2016).

In this study, then, I expand on my master’s thesis research and examine cyberbullying within the theoretical framework of cultural criminology (Ferrell, 2008). In doing so, I argue cyberbullying is a distinct cultural phenomenon², not always linked with or

² Questions are raised if cyberbullying is merely a re-appropriation of the age-old problem of bullying. Drawing on the work of boyd (2014), the distinction between the two become clear

comparable to traditional, offline forms of bullying, because of new technologies that are being utilized by today's young people allowing them new and unique means to cyberbully. Further, by using the theory of cultural criminology, and by framing cyberbullying as a cultural phenomenon, emphasis can be placed on the inherent meaning that is constructed when instances of cyberbullying occur, particularly for those who are or have been victimized. By delving deeper into understanding this meaning, criminologists will be able to further examine cyberbullying within the realm of criminology as they will be better able to understand the meaning of cyberbullying for those who are victimized, which can, in turn, lead to the creation of better, more effective means to both combat cyberbullying as well as addressing victimization.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to articulate the role of meaning, as proposed within cultural criminology, by explicitly focusing on the way meaning comes to impact those who find themselves vulnerable to and victimized by cyberbullying. To do so, I will draw on a piece of popular culture, that being the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*, to investigate the way meaning is constructed as told through the story of Hannah Baker. In doing so, I will make connections between the story of Hannah Baker with two prominent cases of cyberbullying within Canada: the stories of Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons. Thus, the two overarching research questions guiding this study are:

- *Research Question 1:* How does the story of Hannah Baker reveal meaning associated with cyberbullying and subsequent other experiences faced within the series?
- *Research Question 2:* What does this tell us about cyberbullying and experiences of cyber victimization?

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Cultural Criminology³: Emphasizing Meaning

Cultural criminology's founding conception is that "cultural dynamics carry with them the *meaning* of crime" (emphasis added; Ferrell, 2008). Theoretically, cultural criminology explores the way cultural forces interweave with crime and criminality in contemporary society (Ferrell, 2008). Cultural criminologists place high emphasis on "the centrality of meaning, representation, and power in the contested construction of crime" (Ferrell,

where the characteristics of visibility, spreadability, searchability, and persistence are key to cyberbullying. Further, Yang and Grinshteyn (2016) argue cyberbullying is distinctive from traditional means of bullying due the greater dangers and harms posed and as a result of cyberbullying.

³ Cultural criminology is a theory that has been developed not without controversy surrounding it where scholars have criticized the theory for its conceptualization of culture and meaning (Cohen, 1995; O'Brien, 2005; Spencer, 2011). However, a variety of scholars have attempted to resolve debates around the theoretical framework of cultural criminology (Ferrell, 2013; Hayward, 2004; Hayward, 2012; Presdee, 2004), giving it merit as a theory for its unique contributions to the study of culture, crime, and meaning relative to contemporary society. Thus, this posits cultural criminology, despite criticism, may have a place within the discipline of criminology.

2008). Essentially, this theoretical framework places meaning of action and/or behaviour at the forefront of the way actions and/or behaviours are understood perspective to the cultural dynamics and framework it occurs within. Thus, proposing that the culture of contemporary society guides what is deemed deviant and criminal. Ferrell (2008) calls for a movement away from traditional and narrow notions of crime to incorporate symbolic displays of transgression, emotions or feelings invoked by criminal events, and public and/or political events designed to define crime and subsequent consequences. Therefore, cultural criminology can be used to explore phenomenon that is not necessarily criminal, such as cultural phenomenon deviant in nature or that which carries undertones of criminality within it or is existing outside the dominant group culture.

In defining cultural criminology distinctively, Ferrell (2008) further argues for a cultural criminology attuned to prevailing conditions capable of conceptualizing and confronting crime and crime control in contemporary society. Ultimately, cultural criminology attempts to understand crime as expressive as well as to critique perceived knowledge surrounding the politics of crime (Ferrell, 1999, 2008). Overall, cultural criminology can be seen as a theory that lays the groundwork for understanding the construction of a given phenomenon as criminal, deviant, etc. through the basis of cultural understanding, where cultural criminologists become attuned to meaning, public perception, and the role of such actions/behaviours in contemporary society. Furthermore, part of this meaning includes the society and context that crime occurs within where the very laws, policies, and perceptions surrounding criminality also subject the phenomenon to various interpretations and inherently produce meaningful meaning. Essentially, cultural criminologists explore and challenge dominant discourses around crime and criminality by exploring the meaning attributed to these acts and/or behaviours where acts are perceived as inherently distinctive from one another depending upon the meaning constructed.

Using Ferrell's (2008) framework, culture is defined as "the stuff of collective meaning and collective identity" where the notion of the criminal as both a person and a perception comes to life. The term culture suggests a search for meaning where such meaning reveals the capacity of people to act together over time to animate the smallest of objects with both importance and implication (Ferrell, 2008); thus, suggesting it is culture that implies inherent meaning to actions, objects, behaviours, and the like. However, human culture is relatively interesting as it "cannot be reduced to the residue of the social structure", while the social structures tend to shape culture (Ferrell, 2008). Here we see a dynamic interplay between societies themselves, including the social structures and forces within, and the development of culture. Cultural forces, then, are "threads of collective meaning" intertwining with social actors and their circumstances and situations (Ferrell, 2008). As Ferrell (2008) suggests, "the negotiation of cultural meaning intertwines with the immediacy of criminal experience." Here, it becomes important to distinguish the way the public within contemporary society holds agency in determining a public knowledge of what is collectively deemed criminal.

When this negotiation occurs, it is cultural criminology's role to unpack such a phenomenon to begin to understand the dynamics at play behind the scenes to explore meaning relative to the public and society, which, in turn, characterizes the phenomenon. Through the lens of cultural criminology, we come to see the force of culture as dynamic where phenomenon classified as criminal may not be universally applicable, varying from

society to society as the dynamics of that given society shift and change. This can also be true between cultures, or cultural groups, within the same society, hence the “cultural dynamics carry[ing] with them the meaning of crime” (Ferrell, 2008).

Crime and deviance constitute more than an enactment of static group culture, rather, cultural dynamics remain in motion where fluidity of these dynamics connect culture with crime (Ferrell, 2008). Cultural criminologists, as made evident here, are opposed to conformity but prefer heterogeneous meanings associated with culture and understandings of crime. Thus, Ferrell (2008) argues for a cultural criminology that does not ignore these cultural dynamics. Further, this notion is imperative when situating viewpoints toward crime, specifically among those within the criminal justice system. Everyday actions of criminals, police officers, and judges offer insights into the criminal justice system, but also give “important glimpses into the very process by which social life is constructed and reconstructed” (Ferrell, 2008). With this in mind, cultural criminology, then, reveals complex and contested dynamics between cultures of control and cultures of deviance while attempting to seek and provide new ways to see crime along with social responses to it (Ferrell, 2008).

To reiterate, central to cultural criminology is the notion of meaning. Ferrell (2013) defines meaning as “the contested social and cultural processes by which situations are defined, individuals and groups are categorized, and human consequences are understood.” For cultural criminologists, this is highlighted by exploring the example of bloody knuckles after throwing a punch. When a punch strikes someone in the mouth, there really is no inherent or intrinsic meaning associated with it; however, that is until it is explored who was punched – a partner, a police officer, an opponent. Each incident would provoke a different reaction because it *means* something very different to strike a partner compared to a police officer (Ferrell, 2008). Thus, violence, extending to any act of criminality or deviancy, holds meaning, particularly to the perpetrator and victim alike (Ferrell, 2008).

Understanding the cultural dynamics of crime implies cultural criminologists are attune to more than the mere act and/or behaviour itself, but focus on the meaning associated with it, the actors involved, the society and culture it took place within, and the inherent roles and outcomes for those involved. In the theoretical framework of cultural criminology, meaning holds power. Every day various media outlets, such as television programs and newspaper headlines, are giving their own meaningful accounts of crime and criminal justice (Ferrell, 2013). Thus, meaning is seen as a constitutive element of human action at the foundation of human culture where meaning-making is an ongoing, everyday process (Ferrell, 2008, 2013). As Ferrell (2013) proposes, it is this sense of meaning that formed the historical foundations of cultural criminology, which carries forward today where meaning is made in many ways through social interactions and situations of everyday life.

1.2 Cyberbullying as a Cultural Phenomenon: Negotiating Cyberbullying as Deviant

In the context of cultural criminology, I define cyberbullying as a deviant youth internet phenomenon that is perpetuated through the use of electronic media including text, images, and videos, as young people become increasingly tied to the use of social

media platforms, electronic devices, and the internet (Canty, Stubbe, Steers, & Collings, 2016; Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015; Harper, 2017a). We come to see, then, that the internet has “revolutionized social life” and changed the landscape of what it means to be deviant and how such practices are carried out (Durkin & Patterson, 2011, p. 453). Thus, I choose to add the deviant element to the definition of cyberbullying largely because for those outside the youth culture, that being adults such as parents and teachers, are much more likely to classify cyberbullying as deviant because of the harms associated with it for those targeted. We see this deviant element come to light in *13 Reasons Why* whereby cyberbullying accompanied or occurred in addition to other criminal and/or deviant behaviours (see Durkin & Patterson, 2011 for discussion of links between deviant and criminal behaviours). For example, Hannah Baker experienced cyberbullying, which was the initial instance that not only sparked the victimization but also the vulnerabilities and subsequent victimization that followed from distinctive events that took place within the series, where not all of these incidents were directly related to cyberbullying. Prominent within *13 Reasons Why* were depictions of the social issues faced by many young people today such as mental health concerns, bullying and cyberbullying, underage drinking and binge drinking, sexual assault, and suicide, which were also known to occur among Canadian cases of cyberbullying victimization as seen in the stories of Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons. Thus, the definition of cyberbullying ought to recognize how cyberbullying can be linked to or occur alongside a vast array of other forms of victimization and/or social issues.

However, as within the series for those who were not victimized but rather, we on the tapes and linked to specific events Hannah Baker experienced, young people are much more reluctant to classify their behaviours as deviant or criminal, mainly due to the negative connotations associated with such labels (Jensen, 2011). This indicates that for some young people, they are seeing deviancy in a different way – tolerable deviance (Harper, 2017a). Tolerable deviance is when young people accept their behaviour for what it is, but do not label it as deviant and opt for something else (i.e. drama; see boyd, 2014). But what becomes apparent in this discussion of tolerable deviance though, is that young people outside the cyber victim group likely do not realize the implications of their behaviours on those who are targeted and that is because for cyber victims, as will be examined in this study, the cyberbullying they experience carries with it meaning.

Drawing on the inherent importance of this notion of mean, connections are made with the tenants of cultural criminology. It is through the story of Hannah Baker where viewers of the series become attuned to the way the vulnerability and victimization Hannah experiences is affecting her, thereby opening viewers up to the implications of the acts of other and their effects on Hannah – making cyberbullying much more harmful rather than tolerable. Thus, the portrayal of what Hannah experiences has the ability to carry a deeper meaning with it, similar to the aspect of the punch Ferrell (2008) discusses in developing the importance of meaning within a criminal, or cultural, event. For the purpose of this research, then, meaning is inherently important to and for understanding cyber victims who experience the largest impact of the cyberbullying that occurs, that being the inherent harms and risks produced (Wilson & McAloney, 2010). Alongside this victimization, Hannah Baker faced victimization from other situations, which ultimately lead to an overall inability to cope. We, then, that the notion of meaning associated with

the victimization becomes inherently important in the series of *13 Reasons Why* – it not only draws connections to understanding the scope of harm and risk attached to cyberbullying victimization, but connects and develops the framework for ways to evaluate instances of cyberbullying relative to the theory of cultural criminology.

1.3 Media Criminology: Justifying the use of *13 Reasons Why*

The theory of cultural criminology draws on media, particularly that of a cultural nature, to aid in the articulation of the dynamics of a phenomenon and the inherent meaning within it (Ferrell, 1999). Presdee (2000) situates crime, or any cultural phenomenon, into the realm of popular consciousness through a tentative arrangement between those involved (i.e. criminal, police, media, the public); thus, emphasizing the ways media are as much a part of the process as are individuals who commit acts of deviance or crime as well as the police and public. When media projects various mediated views of deviance or crime, the audience consumes information about it and begins to formulate a popular conception, which then becomes a part of popular knowledge (Presdee, 2000) – the more accurate depiction of such behaviours within media, the better the formulation of public perception around the given phenomenon (Haney, 2009). For *13 Reasons Why*, media grabbed the attention of viewers for the depiction of various social issues within the series – this is the “participatory element” Haney (2009) deems imperative for viewership. This leads the potential for the creation of knowledge and non-mediated truths about the realities of cyberbullying for those victimized. As Haney (2009) suggests with crime related media content, relationships to actual realities of crime is merely incidental; however, despite the profitability of the series *13 Reasons Why*, there are characteristics of the series drawing on what appears to be valid and convincing to the audience as accurate. Thus, as we begin to see with cultural criminology, if crime and criminality are to become a commodity, or at the very least a transgression publicly consumed (Presdee, 2000), then more accurate depictions are needed to ensure more accurate popular knowledge regarding the phenomenon.

Given that the public and public knowledge are often driven by mediated views of crime and criminality, by looking at tools of popular culture, such as films and television series, one can begin to articulate the role of meaning provided within the theory of cultural criminology relative to popular culture as one that cannot be discounted. There is a vast array of potential for popular culture to contribute meaningfully to the study of cultural phenomenon through the lens of cultural criminology. Thus, *13 Reasons Why* was chosen for this analysis as it has received an immense following and there is relatability to the storyline and characters involved (Gross, 2017; Dickens, 2017). Despite the controversy and backlash, this series was important as it opened a discussion regarding the many social issues faced by young people today, particularly, in this case, cyberbullying. I use this series as a tool to guide my analysis to see the contributions of the theoretical framework of cultural criminology regarding meaning associated with instances of cyberbullying.

2. METHODS

2.1 Qualitative Media Analysis of *13 Reasons Why*

Extending my master's thesis research (see Harper, 2017a, 2017b), I conducted a qualitative analysis of popular film using season one of the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*. The aim of doing so was to investigate the notion of meaning attributed to cyberbullying victimization as experienced by Hannah Baker, the series main protagonist. The research questions I sought to answer included:

- *Research Question 1:* How does the story of Hannah Baker reveal meaning associated with cyberbullying and subsequent other experiences faced within the series?
- *Research Question 2:* What does this tell us about cyberbullying and experiences of cyber victimization?

2.1.1 Sample

The sample consisted of all thirteen episodes in season one of *13 Reasons Why*. However, emphasis was placed on the specific episodes, that being episode one, episode two, episode four, and episode thirteen, which revealed key links directly to cyberbullying whereas the rest of the series builds off the initial episode and subsequent events throughout the series. It is important to note the analysis draws connections with the content of the entirety of the series because meaning stemming from cyberbullying takes place throughout. With that said, however, little attention is directly given to the main storyline of the episodes outside those of focus, that being those which best pertained exclusively to cyberbullying in order to address the aims and goals of the overarching guiding research questions of this paper. When necessary and for supplemental data, I also referred to the novel *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher (2007).

2.1.2 Data Analysis – Textual & Thematic Analysis

A textual analysis was first employed “to find out what *were* and what *are* the reasonable sense-making practices of culture” (McKee, 2003). This was done through initially critically viewing each episode in season one of *13 Reasons Why*. Doing so allowed me to ensure there were messages within the series that began to construct a depiction of cyberbullying. While viewing the series, I paid attention to the tones within the stories being told within the series.

From here, I turned to a thematic analysis to draw on patterns and themes emergent within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Data were coded according to various themes that were used in my previous research, which remained prominent in this study as well. These themes reflected cyberbullying as a youth cultural phenomenon, the groups involved in cyberbullying (i.e. cyberbullies, cyber victims, cyber bystanders), links with other social issues, and broader elements and characteristics distinctive of cyberbullying (see Harper, 2017a/b). Additionally, themes were added that exclusively reflected the notion of meaning and connections with cultural criminology.

While there are several ways to conduct a thematic analysis, I adhered to the six-step method presented by Braun and Clarke (2008). First, I became familiar with the data by

viewing and re-watching the episodes of *13 Reasons Why*. Notes were made regarding thoughts, assumptions, and connections among the data for reference at later stages of coding and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008). In step two I developed and organized the themes into meaningful groups according to the overarching themes. For this research, priority was given to the themes that depicted meaning, cultural aspects to cyberbullying, and the characteristics of cyber victims. Other themes and coded data will be used for later analyses. Step three called for an organizing of these themes with other related or similar codes to begin to develop overarching themes. Here, themes were organized using a thematic network analysis (Attride-Sterling, 2001), which allowed for me to better organize and connect the data. Through this process themes were linked to other related themes, ensuring I was cautious of overlapping themes within various categories. Following the work of Attride-Sterling (2001), I organized the themes into three distinct groups: basic themes, organizing themes, and global themes. Global themes encompassed principle metaphors within the entire data set, essentially summarizing the lower level themes to draw interpretations and conclusions. Step four and five called for further review, re-organizing, and elimination of redundant themes. Finally, in step six, the themes were re-coded if deemed necessary. Once finalized, themes were given names that described the meaning carried within them. In the reporting of the research findings, supporting quotations were chosen that best reflected the themes and the notion of meaning relative to Hannah's experiences.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Meaning within the series *13 Reasons Why*

I hope you're ready...I'm about to tell you the story of my life. More specifically, why my life ended...if you're listening to these tapes, you're one of the reasons why (Asher, 2007: 7; Incaprera, 2017)

13 Reasons Why revolves around thirteen cassette tapes that Hannah Baker recorded prior to committing suicide, which were circulated in chronological order to those who were featured on them. Hannah gives one reason per tape that attributes responsibility to why or how that person had a role in Hannah's life that led her to her decision to commit suicide. These were recorded with purpose and intent, which starts by giving the listeners the basic rules:

The rules are pretty simple. There are only two. Rule number one: You listen. Number two: You pass it on. Hopefully neither will be easy for you (Asher, 2007, 8; Incaprera, 2017)

The goal of these tapes was for those involved, and arguably those watching the series, to gain perspective into what they did and how this impacted Hannah, thus demonstrating the meaning behind various actions of those involved in Hannah's life and the impact they had on her throughout her story of victimization. This confirms the main tenant of

cultural criminology where the cultural elements, that being the events and experiences Hannah had throughout the series, carry within them the meaning of the act and/or behaviour relating to the experiences of cyberbullying, social problems, and suicide. Ultimately, the tapes portray an understanding of the problems of cyberbullying where one photo online has power, and thirteen events examined together holds much more power.

The tapes are symbolic of the meaning carried with the dynamics of the victimization Hannah faced. Parallels can be drawn to the infamous video of Amanda Todd, which she recorded prior to her own suicide that told her story through her own perspective where Amanda felt she could no longer cope with the cyberbullying she was experiencing (Ayotte-Thompson and Weinstein, 2014). As Belk (2013) states, one's final digital legacy can be a chance to give farewells, instructions, and representations of self. This is true of both the tapes of Hannah Baker and the video of Amanda Todd where each carry on their memory and draws attention to what led them to commit suicide (Belk, 2013). This further indicates that a cyber victim's story has the ability to live on after their suicide, indicating suicide is not the death of their story but rather the beginning to a new one – one that calls into question the impact of the meaning of events the young cyber victims experienced. In doing so, it can be argued the cyber victims created these “legacies” with purpose and intent, realizing there was inherent meaning in their experiences even if it turned out to be detrimental to themselves. Creating this legacy is a way to reveal the meaning so that a broader audience, who may not have known the full story of the cyber victims, can begin to articulate the impact of words, actions, and/or behaviours of others, as was the case in *13 Reasons Why*, which is even more so prevalent in the second and third seasons of the series.

Hannah Baker is relatively new to the town and high school she attends, perhaps giving Hannah the chance to start anew. Young people negotiate identity formation during this period of adolescence by attempting to define who they are relative to their social environment, such as peer cultures through interpretative reproduction⁴ (Corsaro, 1992, 2012); however, utilization of the online domain is changing this process of socialization and identity formation among young people⁵. Quan-Haase and boyd (2011) propose

⁴ Corsaro (1992) indicates children produce their own peer culture through early knowledge and practices that are fundamental to participating in the adult world, which is reflected in the changing process of socialization as the online domain increasingly becomes prominent in the lives of young people. What Corsaro (1992) is indicating is that as children learn to engage with one another, they adapt to their surroundings to produce their own distinct culture, along with cultural practices, with little reliance on adults. Thus, interpretative reproduction is when children, and youth, exist within the world to “creatively appropriate” their own unique peer cultures and, while doing so, they contribute to the reproduction of youth and adult culture.

⁵ For young people, technology and the internet have always been tied to the way they interact and communicate. However, as Andersson et al. (2015) outline, the internet itself, mainly social media and instant communication platforms, must be considered a new kind of social environment by providing “what seem to be endless opportunities” for seeking out, initiating, and maintaining social contacts, which include peers and strangers of a variety of ages and backgrounds around the world. The concern becomes the activities that occur on the internet and the type of environments they create offline (Andersson et al., 2015). For Hannah, what happened online

young people have moved to the use of digital technologies as a way to reach out to peers, become uncensored by the adult world, and to join virtual communities of shared interests. These teen online communities are places of identity development as they can foster feelings of belonging and are a tool for social support; however, not all teens integrate equally within these peer networks where some deal with issues of rejection and exclusion (Quan-Haase & boyd, 2011). As a result, cyberbullying tends to occur where young people are targeted by words, texts, videos, images, and the like. Studies have proven cyber victims are still at risk of cyberbullying even when young people reveal limited information about themselves online (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

When cyberbullying occurs, as Samara and colleagues (2017) have found, victims can experience detrimental consequences regarding socialization due to feelings of distrust, loss of self-esteem, and lack of acceptance by peers (Beran, Mishna, McInroy, & Shariff, 2015; Beyazit, Simsek, & Ayhan, 2017; Haynes & Robinson, 2015; Peker, 2015). Peer relations are important for socialization, and when young people are faced with poor peer relations it places those young people at-risk for traditional and cyber forms of victimization (Cappadocia, Craig, & Pepler, 2013). Due to a cyber victim's online identity, and even their offline identity, becoming synonymous with the content of cyberbullying from their online victimization, a mass audience is constructing an opinion and/or impression of that individual based on the content produced, even if it has no inherent truth. As scholars have pointed out, the online domain plays a complex role in the development of a young person's identity (Andersson, Bohlin, Lundin, & Sorbring, 2015; Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017; Ellison & boyd, 2013; Marwick, 2015; Musil, Preglei, Ropert, Klasinc, & Babic, 2017; Tiidenberg, 2015; Wilson & McAloney, 2010; Yang, Quan-Haase, Nevin, & Chen, 2017) where the cyber victim truly believes their lives and reputations are ruined when they are targeted by cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Therefore, cyberbullying occurring becomes meaningful in the way young people then proceed to articulate, construct, and negotiate their identity. This is particularly relevant to Hannah when she feels as though the entire student body is against her; she has few friends, if any, and does not see where she fits into her social environment as more people are believing the rumours spread about her.

3.2 Meaning within tapes in the series 13 Reasons Why

In tape one of *13 Reasons Why*, Hannah recounts meeting Justin, the school's football star⁶, at a park where Justin took a photograph of Hannah with his cellphone of her sliding

translated into her every day, non-digital environment, thus proving meaning, including the scope and magnitude of harm and risk, has the ability to translate into multiple spaces young people occupy.

⁶ Further research ought to be conducted to determine if links exist between the way cyberbullying is carried forward or perpetuated dependent upon the social position of the cyberbully as compared to the cyber victim. In *13 Reasons Why*, it can be argued Justin's story of what happened between him and Hannah seemed to hold more power or truth over what Hannah described, further suggesting the football star should be perceived as the one to believe over the new girl in the school. As outlined in my previous research (Harper, 2017b), this is a consistent finding within other sources of popular culture, mainly films directly depicting cyberbullying such

down the slide, where one could argue you could slightly see up Hannah's skirt. When Hannah reached the bottom of the slide, she and Justin shared a kiss. The following day, Hannah was the talk of the school where everyone had an opinion about what happened between her and Justin the night before at the park.

...I've heard so many stories that I don't know which one is the most popular. But I do know what is least popular. The truth (Asher, 2007, 29; Incaprera, 2017)

Bryce, using Justin's phone, shared the photo of Hannah throughout the school and it went viral to those within the school walls, not knowing who else's eyes this photo was seen by. This instance ignited the flames that followed for Hannah, indicating that one instance of cyberbullying can translate into others, including offline forms of harm such as traditional bullying.

A rumor based on a kiss started a reputation that other people believed in and reacted to. And sometimes a rumor based on a kiss has a snowball effect. A rumor, based on a kiss, is just the beginning (Asher, 2007, 30; Incaprera, 2017)

Stemming directly from this, a second instance of cyberbullying occurred where Alex, who was formerly in a friend-trio with Hannah and Jessica until teenage drama broke them up, created the "Hot or Not List". Alex pinned Hannah as having the "best ass in their class" versus Jessica as having the worst.

Every single documented event [referring to those on the tapes] may not have happened had you, Alex, not written my name down on that list...And since everyone at school already had a perverted image of me after Justin's little number, I was the perfect choice, wasn't I? (Asher, 2007, 41; Incaprera, 2017)

Alex had set Hannah up for further victimization, which is a key trait of cyberbullies who have intent to cause harm to the cyber victim (Bryant, 1990; Citron, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Not all content has the ability to go viral because it is unknown how others will react, particularly due to the mass amount of content existing and being produced online (James, 2016; Rockett, 2013), but for Alex the list was appealing enough that it at least caught the attention of the student body. This list seemingly gave permission to students to treat Hannah poorly (Asher, 2007, 52). For example, showing how this event held meaning for Hannah in producing subsequent victimization, another incident occurred where Bryce came up behind Hannah at a convenience store and inappropriately

as *The Cyberbully* (Bond & Chanan, 2015), *Cyberbully* (Prupas & Biname, 2011), and *The Duff* (Bello & Sandel, 2015), similarly to the documentaries of the stories of Canadian cyber victims Amanda Todd (Ayotte-Thompson & Weinstein, 2014) and Rehtaeh Parsons (Rau, 2015). Ultimately, this suggests the social hierarchy is indicative of instances of cyberbullying where the social hierarchy exists because young people are able to use social media to share and generate information to develop and maintain social categories and cliques (boyd, 2014).

grabbed Hannah's behind, quoting "Best Ass in Freshman Class" (Asher, 2007, 48; Incaprera, 2017).

The "Hot or Not" list brings up questions of accountability for cyberbullies. Even though Alex held a small role in the entirety of the victimization that Hannah experienced, he still had a role within it, hence his place on the tapes.

...This tape isn't about why you did what you did, Alex. It's about the repercussions of what you did...it's about the repercussions on me. It's about those things you didn't plan – things you couldn't plan (Asher, 2007, 42; Incaprera, 2017)

As mentioned, cyberbullies do not know how others will react to the content they produce. Due to a mass amount of information existing online, particularly within the social networks of young people, it has to capture attention in a way that makes others stop, see it, and engage with it in some way. Because cyberbullying is still a new phenomenon, events like the one seen within *13 Reasons Why* with Alex, raises questions about how to negotiate responsibility for cyberbullies⁷. Nonetheless, in looking back at Hannah, the snowball increasingly built up speed (Asher, 2007, 53) as more people were targeting Hannah to the point that she felt objectified, isolated, and the center of negative attention, which are common to experiences of cyberbullying (Haynes & Robinson, 2015). In turn, this snowball effect can cause detrimental impacts to the victim, as was seen with Hannah throughout the rest of the series. Viewers of the series can directly begin to see within the first two episodes how cyberbullying and related acts and/or behaviours have the ability to mean something to those who are experiencing them⁸.

Later in the series, Hannah is suspecting she has a peeping tom outside her window after hearing an array of suspicious noises throughout the week. In attempts to catch this individual, Hannah and her 'friend' Courtney try to be the ones to catch him instead. However, after drinking alcohol and sharing a private moment, which was a kiss between the two girls, the peeping tom caught them. Hannah, after hearing a shutter click, saw that the peeping tom was Tyler, the school's yearbook photographer. The next day at school a blurry photo of the kiss between Hannah and Courtney was circulating the school where copies existed both online and physically taped to lockers within the hallways. Fitting with the other rumours being spread about Hannah, everyone suspected she was one of the

⁷ This question is consistent with literature surrounding digital evidence in cases of cyberbullying where little is actually known as to how to go about collecting evidence for such cases and who really is deemed responsible and to what degree. Perhaps this links to the convoluted nature of cyberbullying legislation within Canada. As Glasgow (2010) states, what is problematic is the lack of guidelines regarding digital evidence for internet offenders, like cyberbullies. As more court cases have a digital component to them, there is an increasing need to preserve digital evidence (Roderiguez, 2017); however, questions are raised if police can keep up to the rapid nature of the online world (Trottier, 2012). Therefore, this concept of digital evidence in terms of cyberbullying warrants further investigation (Tun et al., 2016).

⁸ This is based on the notion that words, including text, images, and videos produced for the purpose of cyberbullying, do have the ability to cause harm (Jay, 2009).

girls in the photo; however, no one knew who the other girl with her was. Courtney, in tape five, out of fear of being caught as the other girl in the photo, claimed she had seen sex toys and paraphernalia in Hannah's room, thus playing nicely into the rumors already circulating. Once again Hannah was victimized and targeted. However, aside from the rumors, Hannah was left vulnerable because she felt the one safe place she had left, her home and her bedroom, was violated.

Why didn't you leave me alone Tyler? My house. My bedroom. They were supposed to be safe for me. Safe from everything outside. But you were the one who took that away. Well...not all of it...But took away what was left (Asher, 2007, 89; Incaprera, 2017)

Unlike in traditional bullying, where victims can often escape from the torment in the comfort of their own home, cyber victims are not so lucky. This is because, as characteristic of cyberbullying, the phenomenon is able to exist in many of the spaces young people occupy, even when the device is turned off, because physical presence is no longer mandatory to cause harm (Brown, 2017; Bryant, 2011; Green, 1997; Jaffe, 2016; Wilson et al., 2010). Removing the safety of the home leaves the cyber victim even more vulnerable because, as in the case of Hannah, not only did she not have any friends to turn to in her time of need, she did not have a place where she felt truly safe, thus emphasizing the lack of ability to cope with what she was feeling.

...School hadn't been a safe haven of mine for a very long time. And after your photo escapades, Tyler, my home was no longer secure (Asher, 2007, 192; Incaprera, 2017)

As seen through the tape of Tyler within *13 Reasons Why*, cyberbullying can carry meaning in such a way where the cyber victim is left helpless by being stripped of their feelings of safety and security, feeling they are beginning to surrender to the victimization they are experiencing because they really have no one and nowhere to escape.

Throughout the episodes that followed, Hannah's sense of inability to cope intensified as, among other things, the rumors only grew bigger and Hannah was subject to a variety of intense, mature, and complex set of events⁹. In episode thirteen, Hannah found herself in the office of the guidance counselor, Mr. Porter.

It's just everything is hard right now...I don't know where to begin...Right now I feel lost, I guess. Sort of empty...I don't care anymore...I need everything to stop.

⁹ For the purpose of this paper, there is little room to elaborate; however, these episodes within the series would be a fruitful means of analysis for the various other social issues portrayed throughout the show. The choice was made to omit these from the analysis to adhere to the aims of exploring the meaning of cyberbullying laced throughout the series, thus drawing on specific episodes which were directly linked to the topic of focus, which is not to undermine the other elements of the series.

People. Life...I don't want my life to end. That's why I am here (Asher, 2007, 270-273; Incaprera, 2017)

Despite entering his office willingly, Hannah was reluctant to tell Mr. Porter everything she was experiencing and feeling. He ultimately gave her an ultimatum to either address what had happened or to move on.

His door closed behind me. It's staying closed...He's not coming. He's letting me go...I think I made myself very clear, but no one's stepping forward to stop me (Asher, 2007, 279-280; Incaprera, 2017)

Hannah left Mr. Porter's office, walked home, and committed suicide. A response from Mr. Porter could have saved Hannah's life, indicating interventions could have had a great impact for Hannah.

As a result of Hannah's suicide, the meaning attributed to it must be explored as with other cases of cyber victim's committing cyberbullicide, that being suicide as a result of cyberbullying, such as seen in the Canadian cases of Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons. As Daine and colleagues (2013) have found, when cyberbullying occurs, the cyber victim's rate of attempted suicide increases, suggesting the meaning of committing suicide is indicative of a larger, more complex problem (Beran et al., 2015). As explored in my previous research examining cyberbullying as a type of tolerable deviance, suicide is often a culmination of events where the cyber victim was pushed past some sort of threshold of tolerance where the cyberbullying, and subsequent events, created an environment where suicide seems like the only escape (Harper, 2017a). Arguably, then, *13 Reasons Why* begins to shed light on this more complex, larger problem of suicide, that Beran and co-authors (2015) suggest within their research, where Hannah, in the thirteenth tape, commits suicide after a host of other events that prompted her to feel like she has no other option.

In a commentary about the series *13 Reasons Why*, Jacobson (2017), despite critiquing the series, said the topics raised within *13 Reasons Why* "are important and should not be ignored", hence the use of media in the realm of popular culture to depict such complex, real-world issues that young people are in fact facing. In drawing on the work of Hayward (2009), cultural criminology embraces the visual where images themselves permeate the flow of cultural meaning. Thus, the visual representation of suicide within *13 Reasons Why* is visually depicting more than suicide itself, rather laced within are messages regarding cyberbullying alongside various other events and experiences Hannah endured throughout the series, which hints toward the complexity of meaning bound within her choice to commit suicide. As Ryan (2017) indicates, too many programs shy away from showing the serious consequences that can arise as a result of other's actions/conduct against an individual, such as Hannah Baker. However, *13 Reasons Why* shows the viewer these serious consequences and should make the viewer care about these consequences. Therefore, despite the controversy, what is important is uncovering the meaning represented within the series in hopes that the audience realizes, as Hannah states, *it's time to listen*.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

You don't know what went on in the rest of my life. At home. Even at school. You don't know what goes on in anyone's life but your own. And when you mess with one part of a person's life, you're not messing with just that part. Unfortunately, you can't be that precise and selective. When you mess with one part of a person's life, you're messing with their entire life. Everything effects everything (Asher, 2007, 201; Incaprera, 2017)

13 Reasons Why opens the possibility for a conversation to exist around the topics portrayed in the series, such as bullying, cyberbullying, and suicide. This conversation extends from the stories of cyberbullying among Canadian young people such as Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons. Thus, the audience should pay attention to the opportunity the show presents for a discussion of the tough social issues that young people are facing (Aranjuez, 2017). As the playwright for the series states, "... We [did everything we] could to be truthful and to do justice to the lives that kids lead [today]" (Highfill, 2017). Arguably, *13 Reasons Why* is a cultural identifier within recent generations of young people where the internet, social media, and technology infiltrate the lives and spaces young people occupy. As more young people are left vulnerable and victimized by cyberbullying, as incidents of such continue to increase (Shade & Singh, 2016; Wilson et al., 2010), alongside other social issues that can accompany or result from it as seen with Hannah Baker, it is important to critically understand the meaning within such acts in order to best prevent or at least to understand them. Using the relatability of Hannah Baker, it is easily seen how her character within *13 Reasons Why* warranted a particular focus, hence why people should really care about the series. It is less about the story of Hannah Baker and more about what this character can begin to tell society about the larger, more complex issues happening in the lives of young people today who feel connections to Hannah's character, even merely one aspect of her story. Thus, the significance of *13 Reasons Why* comes from the messages and meaning carried within it where stories like Hannah are in fact real (Dickens, 2017; Gross, 2017; Lynn, 2017). Hence drawing on cultural criminology where Ferrell (2013) suggests mediated meanings of everyday experience and situations of crime and the mediated images of crime become indistinguishable; there is a connection between crime, communication, and culture (Presdee, 2004).

In a Canadian context, we know stories like Hannah's are not uncommon as made evident in two prominent Canadian cases, that of Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons. Therefore, the series unravels an intricate narrative, one all too familiar to young people today, while interweaving questions surrounding guilt, blame, trauma, and shame through several key themes, such as cyberbullying (Aranjuez, 2017). The aspect of responsibility is one that viewers should have been taking away from the series (Aranjuez, 2017), which parallels key issues with the phenomenon of cyberbullying as laws and policies, merely reactive measures, are doing little in regard to combating cyberbullying (Deschamps & McNutt, 2016). However, as a result of *13 Reasons Why* and such conversations generated, key questions around cyberbullying, responsibility, and victimization are left unanswered. This is where the role of criminology can be of use for future research.

Cultural criminology offers insights by emphasizing the cultural dynamics of a cultural phenomenon carrying inherent meaning within them, particularly when exploring dimensions of popular culture (Ferrell, 2013), revealing undertones of meaning within cyberbullying acts and/or behaviours. Combining cultural criminology and the study of an element of popular culture revealed key dynamics within the series *13 Reasons Why* that explores the portrayal of cyberbullying within the series. Specifically, emphasizing meaning places a unique perspective on both the phenomenon of cyberbullying and uncovering it within *13 Reasons Why*, which can easily extend into drawing connections with the offline, non-mediated domain. As Ferrell (2013) explores, mediated communication comes to define and construct meanings of crime and crime control where cultural criminologists take these mediated accounts to be an appropriate, and essential, subject matter of criminology to show the dynamic interplay of media, culture, and crime. With this, there is justification for using elements of popular culture and mediated portrayals of phenomena to understanding key issues relating to crime, deviance, and the like. Criminology, through this theoretical framework, proves itself useful to the conversation, literature, and research around cyberbullying and is thereby useful in moving forward to explore the phenomenon of cyberbullying outside popular culture as well. More research ought to be conducted using the framework of cultural criminology, and the discipline of criminology more generally, when exploring cyberbullying related issues because, as demonstrated, meaningful insights can be added to this complex conversation.

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