



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BSW (University of Victoria, 2009)

**““Make Smart Choices!’: Discourses of Girlhood Responsibilization in  
Cybersafety Curricula”**

School of Child and Youth Care

Monday, April 25, 2016

10:00AM

Human and Social Development Building  
Room A451

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Sandrina de Finney, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria (Supervisor)  
Dr. Marie Hoskins, School of Child and Youth Care, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Jo-Anne Lee, Women and Gender Studies Program, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Susan Strega, School of Social Work, UVic

## **Abstract**

Social discourses about cybersafety -the ways we teach people about protecting themselves from and reporting risks in new media- reveal a heightened focus on the part of those who work with girls regarding their risk in cyberspace. This thesis investigates the concern as part of a reoccurring moral panic towards girlhood, drawing from critical feminist, girlhood and child and youth care theories to inquire into how girlhood is being discursively produced through cybersafety education. Study findings from a small sample of Canadian cybersafety materials suggest the phenomenon of cybersafety is dominated by fears of girls' exploitation online by strangers, peers, the media, and even themselves. Themes of girlhood invisibility, shaming, blaming and sexualization are identified as prominent in the curricula. Universal, essentialized notions of girlhood and sexual double standards are promoted, simultaneously constructing girls as victims incapable of managing their own risk while also holding girls legally and morally responsible for their experiences with cyberviolence. Discussion considers the influence of neoliberal and surveillance discourses on responsabilizing girls for their choices online, as well as how the focus on girls' choices negates the systemic nature of cyberviolence and its intersection with issues of homophobia, racism, classism, colonialism and ableism among others. Implications underscore the need for alternative approaches that offer critical pedagogy and tools to challenge gender ideologies in cybersafety work with girls, as well as to consider the needs of girls from marginalized backgrounds.