

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Youth, Media & Sexualization



Jeunes, Medias & Sexualisation

MAY 2009

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

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Cover illustration: Naïma Mimouni

Distribution: YWCA Montreal
1355, René-Lévesque Blvd West
Montreal (Quebec) H3G 1T3
www.ydesfemmesmtl.org
leadership@ydesfemmesmtl.org

This document was prepared by Josianne Millette and Barbara Donné with the help and contribution of Lilia Goldfarb, Carole Boulebsol, Clarissa Soriano, Jade Goldfarb, Amélie Sauvé and Isabelle Lepage. Translations were done by Debby Dubrofsky, Susan Dwire and Emily Keenlyside.

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ISBN : 978-2-923046-09-9

Legal Deposit – Library and Archives Canada, 2009

This document was made possible thanks to the financial contribution of the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec

**Culture,
Communications et
Condition féminine**

Québec 

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FOREWORD

The following texts have been drawn from the presentations offered during the Youth, Media and Sexualization international conference that took place at the YWCA Montreal in May 2009. Please note that these are *summaries*, not transcripts.

The authors have approved these summaries in the language used during the presentation.

Please be advised that the views expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the YWCA Montreal.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Quebec and other societies have witnessed a rising concern among journalists, community organizations, parents, health professionals, teachers and ordinary citizens regarding the early or precocious sexualization of girls and the general sexualization of social space. Broaching this subject, daring to name, identify and criticize it, is no small matter as it is tied in with a very complex system of beliefs replete with taboos and precepts accepted as “common sense”. Sexuality is such a loaded topic. For some reason, we seem unable to discuss it without provoking the opposing positions of backward and intolerant versus modern and liberating. In every society, sexuality is a highly symbolized human experience holding a great array of meanings. Challenging customs and socially conveyed associations is no easy task. Any societal change involving sexuality tends to be perceived as threatening by fundamentalists and as systematically emancipatory by liberals.

For some, the condemnation of sexualization is baseless alarmism or authoritarian moralism. They believe that sexualization is simply proof of girls’ sexual emancipation and agency.

For others, among whom we stand, sexualization, especially early sexualization, is a very disturbing modern phenomenon. Driven by consumerism and not emancipation, it sends a message from archaic ideas that it is normal and healthy to always give a sexual dimension to bodies, girls and women’s bodies in particular, as if their very being and self-actualization depended on never-ending seduction and availability.

To raise the level of this debate and to contribute to the development of knowledge and mobilization in regards to the phenomenon of youth sexualization, the YWCA Montreal Leadership Department decided to organize an international conference which took place in May 2009. This conference, entitled Youth, Media and Sexualization, would provide an opportunity for researchers from around the world to share their thoughts and the results of their research.

The summaries of the conference presentations and roundtable discussions can be found on the following pages. We hope that they will provide much food for thought for everyone concerned with the sexualization phenomenon whether they be teachers, students, community organizers or everyday citizens, so that together we can face this problem with intelligence and determination.



Lilia Goldfarb, Head of the Leadership Department

PANELISTS PRESENTATIONS

Mariette Julien

Mariette Julien holds a Ph.D. in communications and has been teaching at the École supérieure de mode de Montréal (ÉSMM) of the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) since 2002. Her research is focused on the symbolic meanings of contemporary clothing aesthetics (punk, hypersexy, sporty, etc.) and of the body enhancement associated with these fashion trends (piercing, tattoos, make-up, hair removal, etc.).

Mariette Julien has published numerous academic papers on the subjects of advertising, communication, semiotics and philosophy. She has also published *L'image publicitaire des parfums, communication olfactive* (1997), a book about the advertising of perfume, and she is currently co-editing *L'éthique de la mode féminine* which will be published in May 2010.

The excellence of her teaching has won her awards from the Université du Québec à Montréal and the Université de Montréal. She has also been honoured for her community service.

Rachel Chagnon

Trained as a lawyer, Rachel Chagnon is a professor at the Département des sciences juridiques of the Université du Québec à Montréal where she is particularly interested in fields of public law and women rights. Among the many research projects she has been associated with is one studying the impact of the *Employment Equity Act* on women's work with Professor Lucie Lamarche and Professor Francine Tougas of Ottawa University. She is currently working with Professor Francine Descarries on a study of the application of anti-discriminatory principles in the process of media self-regulation. More specifically, this project will examine how the regulatory bodies put in place by the media will ensure that sexual and sexist stereotypes are not perpetuated and are eventually eliminated.

Richard Poulin

A full professor in the departments of Sociology and Anthropology of Ottawa University, Richard Poulin has published *La mondialisation des industries du sexe* (2004), *Abolir la prostitution, manifeste* (2006), *Enfances dévastées. L'enfer de la prostitution* (2007), *Les enfants prostitués* (2007) et *Pornographie et hypersexualisation. Enfances dévastées, tome 2* (2008). He has also published *Desafios do livro mercado para o feminismo* (2005) in Brazil with the collaboration of Nalu Faria, and *Prostituzione, globalizzazione incarnata* (2006) in Italy. In 2009, *Prostitution et traites des êtres humains, enjeux nationaux et internationaux* (dir.) was published along with *Les meurtres en série et de masse, dynamique sociale et politique* (with Yanick Dulong).

Francine Lavoie

Holder of the first doctorate ever awarded by the Université du Québec à Montréal and a Quebec pioneer in the field of community psychology, Dr. Francine Lavoie joined the École de psychologie of the Université Laval in 1979 where she is currently full professor and director of the orientation communautaire doctorate program. In the 1990s, she was made a Fellow of the *American Psychological Association* and the *Society for Community Research and Action*. She has played a major role in the creation of the following prevention programs: VIRAJ (violence in young people's love relationships) and PASSAJ (violence in young people's interpersonal relationships), which are available in Quebec, Belgium and France. She has also carried out some of the first research ever done in Quebec on the presence of violence in teenagers' intimate relationships. Her research covers such diverse subjects as the evaluation of violence protection programs and the characteristics of young aggressors and their victims. Her recent contributions include an epidemiological study of the sexual and physical violence among Nunavik's Inuit people and an investigation into the sexualized social activities of 16 year olds in Quebec.

PANELISTS PRESENTATIONS

Christelle Lebreton

Christelle Lebreton is a Ph. D. candidate in sociology at the Université du Québec à Montréal. For many years, she has been assisting Line Chamberland in her work on homophobia in the workplace and at school. Her main research interests are gender social relations and the development of teenagers' sexual identity, especially in regards to discrimination and socialization.

Francine Descarries

A founding member of UQAM's Institut de recherches et d'études féministes (IREF), Francine Descarries is a professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)'s department of Sociology and director of the Alliance de recherche IREF / Relais-Femmes sur le mouvement des femmes québécoises.

She is researching and studying the evolution of contemporary feminist discourse and the Quebec women's movement, as well as questions relative to maternity, family, women's working conditions, work and family balance and the continuation of the social divide based on sex and gender.

At the beginning of the 1980s, she authored one of Quebec's first books on the social reproduction of sex and gender: *Les cols roses et l'école rose*. In 2003, she co-authored *Espaces et temps de la maternité*, with Christine Corbeil.

During the past years, in response to the express needs of women's groups and to better understand the social fundamentals, she has studied questions related to antifeminism, its discourses and practices as well as the socialization of young girls and sexist advertising,

Rebecca Hains

Rebecca C. Hains is an Assistant Professor of Communications at Salem State College in Salem, Massachusetts. Dr. Hains specializes in the study of children's media use. Focusing specifically on girl's engagement with media culture from a feminist cultural studies perspective, she has spoken about her research across the U.S. and internationally. Her publications include chapters in *Geek Chic: Smart Women in Popular Culture* (2007) and *Women in Popular Culture: Meaning and Representation* (2008) and articles in the scholarly journals *Popular Communication* (2007), *Girlhood Studies* (2008) and *Women's Studies in Communication* (2009).

Dafna Lemish

Dafna Lemish is Professor of Communication at Tel Aviv University, Israel and Founding and current Editor of the *Journal of Children and Media*. Her recent books include *The Wonder Phone in the Land of Miracles: Mobile Telephony in Israel* (with Cohen and Schejter, 2008); *Children and Television: A Global Perspective* (Blackwell, 2007); *Children and Media at times of Conflict and War* (co-edited with Götz, 2007); *Media and the Make-Believe Worlds of Children: When Harry Potter Meets Pokémon in Disneyland* (with Götz, Aidman, and Moon, 2005); *Media Education Around the Globe: Policies and Practices* (co-edited with Tufte and Lavender, 2003) as well as close to 100 book chapters, refereed articles and encyclopedia entries. She currently is a Visiting Professor with the Center on Media and Child Health (CMCH) of Children's Hospital Boston and the Harvard Medical School. In 2010, she'll publish *Screening Gender on Children's Television : The Views of Producers around the World*.

Shari Graydon

Shari Graydon is an author, social activist and communications consultant. She draws on her diverse background as a newspaper columnist, broadcast commentator, PR executive, political press secretary and

communications instructor to deliver media analysis keynotes to educators and health professionals, and media relations training to nonprofits. For 8 years she served as the President of *MediaWatch* (now *Media Action*), with which she continues to volunteer. Her award-winning media literacy books for youth include *Made You Look – How Advertising Works and Why You Should Know*, and *In Your Face – The Culture of Beauty and You*.

Claudia Mitchell

Claudia Mitchell is a James McGill Professor in the Faculty of Education of McGill University and an Honorary Professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her research areas include girlhood studies, participatory arts based approaches to methodology and addressing HIV and AIDS with youth. Much of her work is in Southern Africa. Currently she is involved in several visual projects including a study of use of photovoice with girls and women in Rwanda, and participatory projects with aboriginal youth and youth in rural South Africa in addressing HIV and AIDS. She is the author of more than 14 books. Her latest book, *Teaching and HIV&AIDS in the South African classroom*, has been launched in Cape Town in June, 2009. She is founding co-editor of *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. She is also Executive Director of the *Centre for Visual Methodologies for Social Change* at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Sharon Lamb

Sharon Lamb, Ed.D., Professor of Psychology at St. Michael's College in Vermont, is also Distinguished Professor of Mental Health at U Mass Boston where she began teaching in the fall. She is the author or editor of seven books, including *The Secret Lives of Girls: What Good Girls Really Do*; *Sex Therapy and Kids: Addressing Their Concerns through Talk and Play*; *Packaging Girlhood* which is the topic of the conference's talk; and with Lyn Mikel Brown and Mark Tappan, the recent *Packaging Boyhood: Saving Our Sons from Superheroes, Slackers, and Other Media Stereotypes*. She served on the American Psychological Association's Sexualization of Girls Task Force and she is currently working on a sexual ethics curriculum for teenagers.

Susan Linn

Psychologist Susan Linn is Associate Director of the Media Center of the Judge Baker Children's Center, Instructor in Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, and Director of The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, which she co-founded. She has written extensively about the effects of media and commercial marketing on children. Her book, *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood* was been praised in publications as diverse as *The Wall Street Journal* and *Mother Jones* and helped launch the movement to reclaim childhood from corporate marketers. The *Boston Globe* called her new book, *The Case for Make Believe: Saving Play in a Commercialized World*, "a wonderful look at how play can heal children."



Why Hypersexy Fashion?

Mariette Julien traces the roots of hypersexual fashion and provides a theoretical overview of its various manifestations in contemporary society.

Navel exposed, belly shirts, g-string rising above low cut pants, *dessous dessus*¹, tight jeans, and plunging necklines...modesty appears to have disappeared from Western fashion. Hypersexy fashion is causing controversy, and for good reason: it is changing our relationship with each other, turning traditional values upside down, and weakening the social recognition of women. Following the example of other fashion trends, it both reflects and influences ways of being and thinking about our society (Monneyron, 2001). To better understand it, we need to retrace its social origins and examine the symbolism surrounding it.

Punk Aesthetic

We often forget that it is youth - and not the industry – that initiate fashion trends. For example, it was youth themselves that popularized the black biker jackets of the 50s, jeans and T-shirts, Doc Marten boots, and, later, grunge fashion. But it is the punk style that has most influenced today's fashion. It was girl punks who were the first to appropriate a prostitute style and use it for their own personal gain (Roue, 1986). They dressed in a sexualized way in order to attract men only to then reject or fight them; they invented “girlpower” – the power of the “tease” girl, which is the very foundation of hypersexy fashion.

Punks radically changed our values and perceptions around beauty. They succeeded in making shaved heads, *bedhead*, streaks, unkempt beards, pierced noses and tattoos fashionable – all styles considered cool because they give off a youthful, rebellious air – very much appreciated in today's fashion.

Sex as Commodity & the Need to “See Everything”

The biggest influence on hypersexual fashion remains “pornification” (Poulin, 2004) – the omnipresence of sex in the media, combined with the trivialization of pornography and the commodification of sex. An example of this is the removal of pubic hair, now a common practice among the majority of youth. The increased visibility of genitals and the infantilizing of the adult female body – sanitized, prepubescent, and virginal - spark the inevitable voyeurism that marks the trend. This new perception of the ideal body, removed of hair that is no longer considered erotic, has its own particular influence on fashion: wearing belly shirts with ultra low rise pants shows off the torso in a way that suggests clean-shaven genitals, which are now considered sexy (Julien, 2007).

Another influence on hypersexy fashion can be found in our contemporary need to see everything. The desire to be seen overrides the desire to be understood, and nudity – mental and physical – is the motto of the day (Enriquez, 2005). The symbolic implication of showing as much of their body as possible is that girls – and increasingly boys – have nothing left to hide. This phenomenon of *extimacy* responds to the need to attract the interest of others, a product of an individualistic society where each person's gaze is turned towards the self (Tisseron, 2001). For example, youth are so accustomed to the codes embedded in reality TV - which are tied to the revelation of that which should remain intimate - that they both perceive modesty to be an anti-social gesture, and confuse public self-disclosure with authenticity.

1 The French term for wearing lingerie over everyday clothing.

It is not considered cool to be straight, happy or modest, since disruptive behaviour better succeeds in attracting media attention. It is not surprising, then, that many people, especially youth, make the unconscious choice of wearing immodest and rebellious clothing borrowed from once-underground styles.

Celebrity and Instant Gratification

Extimacy is no stranger to the cult of celebrity that prevails in today's society. The influence of the "beautiful people" results in egocentrism and excessive behaviours that are so unfettered that school and college courses now exist in order to help young people free themselves from their obsession with fame. Hypersexy fashion and its navel-gazing tendencies perfectly symbolizes this type of indulgent behaviour, which characterizes not only young celebrity "junkies" but, more broadly, current social life (Julien, 2007).

Because youth's identities and personalities are in developmental stages, teens and "tweens" are particularly at risk of being influenced by the representations of their idols. In dressing like their favourite stars, they are unconsciously seeking recognition from their peers. Young girls have a hard time comprehending moralizing adult commentary regarding their appearance, since the environment in which they are growing up in consistently values women who are hypersexy, rich, and famous. Knowing the social recognition that comes with being famous, it is hard for youth not to envy stars, and it comes as no surprise that unearned fame becomes a life's goal; it allows one to shine without having accomplished anything real, and offers fast - if not instant - access to a privileged social status.

This instant gratification is part of young people's way of life. Perception of time has radically shifted with the arrival of new technologies, of which youth are the principal users. Waiting for pleasure, or even love, is not fathomable; immediate satisfaction has come to be expected. This denial of the future, fed in part by the collective fear of environmental problems, causes them to take risks and be willing to try everything. Living day to day, according to Enriquez (2005), causes us develop an obsession with fullness; in other words, obtain as much pleasure as possible now because tomorrow might be the end. In this context, hypersexy fashion is once again legitimized, given its connection to instant seduction, its promotion of sexual pleasure without commitment, and the image of a woman ready for anything.

Over-consumption and Performance

Hypersexy fashion can also be tied to new habits of over-consumption (Lipovetsky, 2006), which are based on perpetual feelings of dissatisfaction. According to the philosopher Damien Le Guay (2005), the need to change for change's sake rubs off on our romantic lives and encourages us to move onto new conquests, to live multiple sexual experiences, and to want to try everything. In a similar vein, the media specialist Jacques Gautrand (2002) suggests that the post-modern individual must project a self-image that is desirable, appetizing, and edible. A sexy appearance perfectly demonstrates how the act of consumption manifests in the sexual domain: above and beyond being grounded in the stereotype of a woman who can be bought, it responds to the expectations of the contemporary consumer – who is impatient, demanding, insatiable, and unfaithful - for whom the impulse to buy is triggered by packaging.

Over-consumption also plays on one's constant need to look and feel younger, to the point where it has become more important to look young than it is to be intelligent or distinguished. Adults, babyboomers in particular, do not want to grow old, and borrow their hair and clothing styles from youth. Consequently, the only thing left for young people to do in order to rebel is to turn to their bodies – which represent a priceless advantage in a society that thrives off the myth of eternal youth. By showing off their bodies, youth - however unconsciously - perform in a way that symbolically imposes their supremacy. Skin becomes the clothing that distinguishes them from adults (Julien, 2007), clothing from which they derive pleasure in decorating (piercing, branding, scarification, tattooing) and modifying (hair removal, fitness, breast implants). Hypersexy fashion responds to the related need for gratification through exposing the work invested in one's body.

Conclusion

The influences on hypersexy fashion run even deeper still; consider the impact on the construction of femininity of Barbie dolls (Calefato, 2004), of film, advertising, and comic books. One thing is for certain with regards to fashion: it is difficult to escape an environment that we ourselves shape. In fact, the more that we study hypersexy fashion, the more we uncover its links to our ways of being, of learning, of doing, and of feeling. Whether we want it to or not, this is the fashion trend that best defines contemporary Western culture: it captures the importance we place on the gaze, consumption, sex, stardom, performance, youth, pleasure, instant gratification -- and authenticity morals.

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Self-Regulation and the Elimination of Sexist Stereotypes in the Canadian Media: The Current Context

Rachel Gagnon presents a collaborative research project designed to more effectively counter the persistent usage of sexist stereotypes in various media.

A range of stakeholders from diverse community and institutional milieux share a common concern over problems of sexism in the media, in particular the prevalence of sexual or sexist stereotypes. But how does the law function with regards to sexual and sexist stereotypes? How can it protect society from hypersexualization? These are the research questions YWCA Montreal hoped to answer in partnership with the Université de Québec à Montréal (UQAM); the initial findings described below help to begin to answer them.

A Legal Framework

Above all else, Canadian law protects the right to equality, as stated in the Canadian Constitution as well as the Quebec and Canadian Charters of Rights and Freedoms. This right is also found in certain laws overseeing radio and television broadcasting, under the Broadcasting Act (1991), Radio Regulations (1986), and Television Broadcasting Regulations (1987). For example, the latter stipulates that:

5. (1) A licensee shall not broadcast

(b) any abusive comment or abusive pictorial representation that, when taken in context, tends to or is likely to expose an individual or a group or class of individuals to hatred or contempt on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age or mental or physical disability

As a result, radio and television broadcasters are obliged to promote equality between persons and must abstain from presenting hateful or scornful viewpoints or offensive images that may cause harm to a certain group. This obligation of respect for notions of equality and non-discrimination constitutes a point of entry to the fight against hypersexualization and sexual or sexist stereotypes in the media because it allows for a formal complaint process. It should be noted, however, that no law or regulation of this sort applies to written media, such as newspapers or magazines. The Internet also manages to avoid these regulations, which were developed before the onset of the Web 2.0.¹

Organizations

The laws and regulations overseeing media and publicity content, when applicable, are carried out by three organizations: the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC), and Advertising Standards Canada (ASC).

Created in 1976, the CRTC is the federal, public authority in charge of regulating and supervising Canadian broadcasting and telecommunications and enforcing principles of equality and non-discrimination. They receive complaints directly and refer to other appropriate organizations as required. Judgments are made public and it is possible to make an appeal. In the case of a guilty verdict, the offending organization risks losing its broadcasting license. The non-renewal of a license is the only type of sanction the CRTC can impose.

Depending on the case, the CRTC can send a complaint to a private arbitration tribunal responsible for the enforcement of the equality laws for radio, television, and advertising, as well as the handling of content that

1. The expression Web 2.0 is used to describe applications designed to facilitate information sharing and collaboration between users. These applications form what is referred to as social networks. Blogs, Wikipedia, Facebook, and Twitter are among the most popular and well-known examples.

is judged offensive. The Canadian Association of Broadcasters and The Association of Canadian Advertisers created the CCNR and the NCP with the goal of self-regulation. The creation of these organizations was justified by the need to balance the protection of freedom of expression from state censorship and the importance of being able to guarantee the right to equality. In all cases, industry develops its own ethic codes and committees designed to guarantee their enforcement comprise volunteer members from both the public and private sectors. Sanctions in radio and television result in the obligation of the guilty party to repeatedly announce the verdict and, in advertising, to modify or pull the content that is judged to be offensive.

Relevant Concepts

In addition to the right to equality, which is written into both federal and provincial Constitutions, the tribunals overseeing media content base their judgments on the notion of pornography, more specifically that which is criminally obscene. If the right to equality guarantees everyone freedom from sexual and sexist stereotypes in principle, then in legal terms the concept of obscene pornography should forbid any publication whose dominant theme is the undue exploitation of sex or the subject of sex in general, and any one or more of the following subjects; crime, horror, cruelty and violence.

Although the criminalization of obscene pornography is not intended to guarantee equality between men and women, tribunal judgments tend to consider sexual or sexist images that degrade women to be obscene. The legal notion of equality, therefore, tends to move towards that of pornography; sexual or sexist stereotypes are then considered obscene rather than discriminatory.

The Current Sate of Affairs

The critical review of judgments by the CRTC, the CCNR, and the NCP organized by the YWCA Montreal and UQAM suggests that advertising, more often than television or radio, is the cause of most complaints. The advertising industry also appears to be more severe than their counterparts in radio and television with regards those who break their ethics codes. It is also apparent that content considered “serious” is more commonly punished than that which is considered comedy.

The format of complaints also has an impact on judgments made. Those that adopt a more legal than ideological tone are generally better received. Finally, the notion of stereotype upon which judgments are made appears to be particularly fluid and the interpretations on the part of different tribunals and committees are unequal.

In spite of this, considering the legal framework as well as the criteria upon which the various tribunals base their judgments, launching complaints remains the main point of entry for the fight against hypersexualization and the representation of sexual and sexist stereotypes in the media.

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Sex industries, hypersexualization and pedophilization.



Richard Poulin explores the link between the growth of the sex industry and the sexualization of girls suggesting that the worldwide explosion of the sex industry since the 1990s has resulted in the pornification of culture, the trivialization of prostitution and, as a consequence, the commodification of women and girls.

The Pornification of Culture

We live in an era of ongoing sexual solicitation; sex is everywhere. It is rented, bought, sold, and it sells. The pornification of culture refers to the omnipresence of pornography in everyday life and its effect on the imaginary, on attitudes, and on behaviours. Television, magazines, the Internet, and advertising are among the many sources that bombard our lives with sexualized images of increasingly younger girls. Unlike twenty years ago, it is no longer necessary to search for pornography to consume it. Also, women are consuming more pornography than ever before, and consumers, both male and female, are getting younger and younger.

The Pornographic Sexualization of Girls of all Ages

We are currently witnessing an overall rejuvenation of the sex industry. Prostitution and related trafficking of children worldwide is on the rise, and pornography of all kinds is having an effect on our young people.

Despite the fact that most people condemn pornography, the sheer quantity of child pornography on the Internet proves the existence of adults' attraction to children as sexual objects. The various means by which the widespread availability of all kinds of pornography legitimizes child pornography and encourages men to sexually abuse children is an issue that needs to be acknowledged in more depth.

Pseudo-child pornography is a niche market that, while legal because it uses women over the age of eighteen, plays with children's imagery by dressing the actors in school uniforms, putting their hair in braids, or having them pout or engage in other child-like behaviours. This allows men to fantasize about relations with children without being considered pedophiles. Its popularity is proven by the enormous success of the Hustler produced series *Barely Legal*.

Another market that is able to circumvent child pornography and obscenity laws is the "non-nude" phenomena, whereby girls are presented in highly sexualized ways but remain clothed. These sites, however, act as portals and they commonly redirect consumers to either pseudo or real child pornography sites.

The Impact of Pornography on Our Lives

Pornography has a significant impact on our daily attitudes and behaviours; to argue otherwise would be to ignore everything that we already know about individuals' development in cultural and social contexts. For example, if Americans spend almost \$400 billion dollars a year on mass media publicity - precisely because these images attract consumers - how could pornography possibly be exempt from having an impact on people?

Pornography influences young people's sexuality, fantasies, and desires. Not only are young people exposed to pornography before the legal age allowed to do so, most are in fact quite young: in a recent survey 72% of young men and 56% of young women report having looked at pornography before the age of fourteen. Given the average age at which they are first exposed to it (thirteen and twelve for girls and boys, respectively), pornography can have a permanent impact on their sexual life – in particular the construction of fantasies based on relations between men and women that cater solely to the pleasure of men.

Added to the gender stereotypes perpetuated by pornography is the media pressure that normalizes pornography and prostitution, hypersexualizes the female body, and blurs the lines between adult and child. For example, the removal of pubic hair, now the norm in the pornography industry, was first popularized in magazines such as Playboy, Penthouse and Hustler at the end the 1980's. This practice, now widespread amongst the general public (and a common expectation of women by young men), demonstrates the influence of pornography on the mentalities associated with intimacy. A recent study on young people's consumption of pornography revealed that 85% of girls and 51% of boys reported to have removed all or nearly all of their pubic hair.

Following the example of hardcore pornography actors, young women also pierce and tattoo themselves, enlarge their lips and their breasts, or reduce the lips of their vulvas – as if pornographic norms literally penetrated their skin. A survey of young people also showed a direct link between the age at which they are first exposed to pornography and the body; among both boys and girls, the younger their exposure, the more likely they were to report having tattoos or piercing.

Pornography and Pedophilia

A number of American studies indicate that men who are not pedophiles experience a certain level of sexual excitement when exposed to images of girls. One study revealed that more than a fifth of the male subjects demonstrated a sexual attraction to young children. Another reported that between 10% and 15% of subjects could envision a sexual relation with a child if they were certain to not face any consequences for doing so. A Norwegian study of 710 young men between the ages of eighteen and nineteen reported that 19.1% of them would be willing to have a sexual relationship with a girl of thirteen or fourteen years of age. This sub group also consumed pornography on a regular basis and evolved in social circles within which it was acceptable to look at child and other violent pornography. These young men also reported a higher willingness than other subjects to force their partners into giving them sexual favours.

Sexual attraction to children is a precursor to sexual aggression and, in a society where sexual contact between child and adult is one of the last remaining taboos, this attraction is also a precursor to the sexual exploitation of minors. According to David Finkelhor, who identified four conditions leading to the rape of children in societies that criminalize it, a potential sexual offender has to overcome more than his own inhibitions. He also has to overcome the social obstacles to accomplishing such an offense – and pornographic pedophilisation opens the door for him to do so.

Alarming Facts

- Non-pedophile males can be attracted to children and adolescents.
- Pseudo-child pornography validates sexual relations between adults and children; abusive behaviours are normalized as they become shared by thousands of other consumers of pornography.
- The number of sexual aggressions in our society is on the rise.
- In Quebec, adolescents commit an estimated 20% of rapes.
- The majority of rape victims are also adolescents: according to Statistics Canada, of the 15 000 sexual aggressions reported to the police, more than two thirds are from girls aged eleven to seventeen years old.
- The Canadian Homicide Survey reports that young people between the ages of fifteen and nineteen are at highest risk of being killed by their romantic partner.

It is not entirely certain that our society, which bans sexual activity with people under the age of consent, also condemns attraction to them. The thriving child and pseudo-child pornography industries suggest that sexual attraction to children may be widespread among men who are considered “normal”. Combined with the realities of a youth obsessed society where women are expected to remain forever young, it is ever more pressing to reflect on the ways in which we can continue fighting against both hypersexualization and pornography.

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Sexualized Social Activities: A Moralistic or Educational Approach?



Francine Lavoie summarizes the findings of a preliminary survey on the phenomena of Sexualized Social Activities (SESA), which sheds light on the debate as to whether this phenomenon reflects new forms of sexual exploration or harmful sexual practices that are culturally reinforced to the detriment of one gender over the other.

SESA

It may be surprising for some to learn that even in predominantly female university departments, initiations include sexually driven activities such as mock fellatio contests and the mimicking of sexual acts. A variety of questions emerge from observing these *sexualized social (i.e. public) practices, which are non-remunerated and presumably voluntary*: Are these activities as widespread as one might think? Who is most susceptible to participate in them? Do they engage both genders equally?

Focus groups and interviews with both youth and youth workers familiar with the phenomena informed the design of a questionnaire for grade 10 and 11 students. The results are based on the responses of 815 youth, boys (43%) and girls (57%), between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, 70% of whom live with their family of origin. A small percentage, comparable to what can be found in the general population, had experienced a situation of abuse as children (5%) or adolescents (8%). Because the intention was to collect the responses of “ordinary youth”, the sample can be considered representative of their age group.

Roughly one third of respondents had already experienced a “friend with benefits” (32%) or a “one-night stand” (30%) situation. The average age for a first experience of oral sex was around fourteen, which more or less corresponds with the average age for first-time intercourse.

Participants were questioned about their experiences of, and attitudes towards, various SESA; group masturbation, fellatio and wet T-shirt contests, group sex, strip teases, mock fellatio, homosexual kissing for an audience, dancing in a way that mimics sexual positions, and *danse sandwich*¹. The latter was the most common amongst respondents; almost half of them reported having engaged in it (42%). The prevalence of this activity in particular suggests a need for further investigation in order to determine if youth appropriate it in a de-sexualized way and, if so, if it should continue to be considered a SESA.

On average, one youth out of ten reported having done a striptease, a mock fellatio, kissed someone of the same sex for an audience, or danced in a way that mimics a sexual act. Between 3% and 5% of respondents reported having participated in group sex or masturbation, fellatio or wet T-shirt contest.

While almost half of the youth surveyed (46%) reported never having engaged in a SESA, more than a quarter (28%) had engaged in one, and more than one in ten (12%) reported having engaged in three or more types of SESA. Within the parameters of the study, it is the latter respondents who are considered “at risk”.

How Innocent are SESA?

According to the findings, participation in SESA is in no way trivial. In fact, more than a third of youth that reported having done a strip tease, kissed someone of the same sex for an audience, participated in a masturbation contest or group sex also reported feeling uncomfortable about it the following day. More than

1. The original French term “danse sandwich” refers to a very close dance between more than two people. Inspired by music videos, it usually involves a number of women dancing suggestively against one man. The closest English translation would be grinding.

10% of those who had participated in a fellatio or wet T-shirt contest or a mock fellatio game offered the same response. That said, a majority of youth reporting having observed a SESA stated that they had wanted to participate. In the case of group sex and fellatio contests, the number was as high as 80%.

None of the youth participating in the study reported having been threatened or physically forced into a SESA. Verbal pressure was also rare, except during wet T-shirt contests and strip teases. Youth who masturbated in a group, who kissed someone of the same sex for an audience or who did a striptease reported having been encouraged to do so by their peers.

Who is Regularly Engaging in SESA?

Youth considered “at risk” - those reporting having participated in three or more types of SESA - share a history of non-committal sex and, in general, demonstrate positive attitudes towards SESA. However, there are differences between girls and boys who regularly engage in SESA. For boys, a stressful life situation (moving, living in a care facility, failing school) or having a member of their social group involved in the sex trade appears to favour their active participation in SESA. For girls, it is more often the consumption of Internet pornography, alcohol, or drugs that appear to have the most impact.

With the exception of group sex and masturbation or wet T-shirt contests, more girls engaged in the different types of SESA explored in the study. They were also more likely to report feeling uncomfortable about it the next day.

Points for Discussion

It appears that Sexualized Social Activities are fairly widespread. The feeling of discomfort felt by many young participants implies these activities are not innocent. The results of this study suggest that those youth who are living through difficult situations or who frequently consume pornography, drugs, or alcohol, are more inclined to engage in SESA. It also appears that youth experience SESA differently according to their gender; girls participate in higher numbers and report both feeling valorization and discomfort for having done so.

The phenomena of SESA appears to stem from other current social trends such as the increasingly pornographic nature of social encounters, the objectification of the body, or the tendency to replace intimacy with extimacy. One thing is for certain: concern over this phenomenon should not translate into a moralistic position. Rather, we should educate adolescents to exercise choice with regards to their sexuality and to insist upon a healthy environment to live it. This role is particularly important for adults to assume, given the feelings of uncertainty many youth feel when faced with the growing variety of sexual behaviours that are proposed to them.

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Girlpower in Quebec Girls' Magazines

Christelle Lebreton describes the main findings of her MA project, which analyzed the content of Quebec girls' magazines popular amongst teens aged 12-16. She examined half of the issues published by Alexine, Cool!, Filles Clin d'oeil, Full filles, and Elle Québec Girl between September 2005 and August 2006 in order to identify models and representations of femininity, masculinity, and relationships between the sexes.

The Model of Girlpower Found in Magazines

The Girlpower presented in girls' magazines suggests that girls can obtain power from engaging in sexualized activities (Bouchard and Bouchard, 2003). This model comprises three interrelated dimensions: it systematically peaks readers' interest in romantic relationships and equates seduction with sexual provocativeness; the role models it promotes are primarily professionals in fields aimed to seduce (such as fashion, beauty, and media); and it reinforces female stereotypes that place a sexualized value on girls' bodies. This model therefore depends on a traditional conception of women wherein their power lies in their ability to seduce men -- a perspective that cuts across all types of articles.

Double Standards

Magazine representations of male-female relationships are limited to traditional, romantic ones and reflect double standards applied to girls' and boys' sexuality. No articles focus on "nice guys" or healthy relationships, however "players" - boys only interested in using girls for sex - are frequently mentioned in both letters from readers and in featured articles on the topic of relationships. The theme of sexuality also surfaces in girls' letters, and in articles that focus on girls' search for true love.

In their responses to readers, the "experts" reinforce the notion that boys are interested in sex whereas girls are romantic. These adults also perpetuate the belief that girls have to be proactive in heterosexual romance; if readers imply that their relationship is dysfunctional, the advice often encourages them to look for "the one" real love, a prince charming, or a gentleman:

*You need to have the courage to go after your prince charming.
There's one out there for you, guaranteed.¹*

In order to achieve this, then, girls have to learn to distinguish between the good guys and the bad ones and articles designed to help girls decode boys' behaviour are numerous. In these articles, the acceptance of the essential nature of boys' earlier and greater interest in sexual matters, infers that girls must then take responsibility.

The eternal classic! It's a given that guys are generally in more of a rush than us girls²

The onus remains on the girls alone. They are expected to be understanding towards boys, and even privilege their romantic relationships over to the detriment of their female friendships, without expecting the same in return from their boyfriends. Girls' maturity is used to justify the expectation that it is up to them to solve any problems in their relationships.

Other articles illustrate the double standard between girls and boys in regards to their reputations. While a boy can improve his reputation if a girl agrees to have intercourse with him, this same girl's reputation then

1. (2005, October). Le courrier de perle. [The Advice Column] Full fille, 20.

2. (2005, November). Love: casse-tête amoureux [Love: A Romantic Puzzle], Alexine, 20

becomes tainted. The importance of reputation is evident in the anxiety readers express in letters on the topic of being used by boys. The advice given to girls to help them avoid being used provides them with the means to keep their reputation intact. This implies that it is girls' responsibility to protect themselves from sexual interest. Again, the emphasis is on making the right choice, which explains the countless pieces of advice found in magazines that suggest girls can't really trust boys' word. Boys accountability is never emphasized – it's up to girls to spot the right boy, to make the right choice:

Before going out with your chosen one, try to determine if his intentions are honest or if he only wants something from you that he can brag to his friends about.³

A Paradoxical Model of Girlpower

The model of Girlpower presented in girls' magazines promotes a femininity based on the power to seduce. At the same time, and in contradiction to this model, any desire or sexual needs on the part of girls is erased from discussions with them about their romantic relationships. In these magazines, boys are depicted as wanting only to use girls for sex – and therefore holding the power. The double standard that suggests that girls want love and boys want sex is not only left unquestioned, it appears to be reinforced by the discourse prevalent in girls' magazines. This discourse reveals that girls still find themselves in a situation where they have to preserve their reputation – which is increasingly more complex to navigate given the new norms of seduction they are exposed to.

The ideology that underlies this model of Girlpower operates in opposition to the concept of empowerment, which allows girls to improve their skills in order to develop their confidence, self esteem, and a sense of initiative - thus their own power (Eisen, 1994). Far from being empowering, this model of Girlpower in fact risks disempowering girls. Consequently, the hypersexualization of girls and women, which find support in this model, renders them even more vulnerable to all forms of sexual exploitation.

3. (2005, December). Entre nous: toutes les questions que tu devrais te poser avant de sortir avec lui [Between Us: All the Questions You Should Ask Yourself Before Going Out With Him] Cool! 51

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Sex Stereotypes and Sexist Advertising: Sex Sells!



Francine Descarries provides an overview of the powerful yet commonly underestimated effects of advertising on women and youth, and emphasizes the need to continue the struggle for gender equality through direct action and consciousness raising.

In September 2008, Lise Ravary, editor in chief of *Châtelaine* magazine, publicly reacted to the Conseil du Statut de la Femme's publication *Sex in the media: obstacle to equal relationships*. She stated, among other assertions, that sexist advertisements were a thing of the past¹. Her editorial standpoint perpetuates the illusion that we have reached equality and, in doing so, denies both the hypersexualization of public and media space, and the social and structural inequalities that still affect the daily lives of many women.

In a society marked by an unprecedented sexualization of public space, how can one suggest that the struggle for social equality has been won? In a society where the image of women is expected to conform to a young, thin, and sexy ideal, how is it possible to consider that equality between the sexes has been achieved?

Sex Sells

Quebec has long been considered by many to be a society that is proactive in the fight against hypersexualization, particularly in the realm of sexist advertisements. It now appears, however, that the vigilance once demonstrated has been abandoned far too early. Sexism is more widespread than ever before, as proven by the thousands of advertising messages to which we are exposed to everywhere – even in universities washrooms.

According to researchers (Kilbourne, 2000), advertising is the most powerful socializing force of the modern age. It dulls our desires and shapes our attitudes, expectations, and needs (Ramonet, 2001). Whether we accept it or not, advertisements carry ideological messages and propose – or rather impose – definitions for individuals, groups, and social relations.

In 1978, the Conseil du Statut de la femme deemed that advertising was sexist if it *reproduced prejudice against women, their character, and their role in society*. In a contemporary context, we can add to this the use of women's bodies, nudity, and sexuality for the sole purpose of selling a product or sending a message (La Meute, 2002). Sexist advertising makes public a particular vision – and gaze - towards women (Dao, 2002).

For some time now, it has also been recognized that models' posture and positions are organized in a manner that reflects their respective social position (Goffman 1977). Thus, in sexist advertisements, women are more often than not placed in submissive positions that suggest or accentuate their availability, inferiority, fragility, and vulnerability.

Media Discourse

Based on an observation of hundreds of images and writings on the subject, notably the documents available online from *La Meute contre la publicité sexiste* (La Meute, 2002), it is evident that sexist advertising has its effects:

1. "...des choses qu'on ne voit plus aujourd'hui."

- It presents a world saturated with sexuality in which daily life is hypersexualized, the female body is constructed for the pleasure of others, and sexuality as a question of performance. Advertising sexualizes the world, encouraging early sexualization and the eroticization of childhood.

- It imposes a fictitious body image that distorts women's relationships to their bodies and cultivates a narcissistic sense of self. Media images succeed in homogenizing the female body while both propagating an irrational refusal to grow old and reducing women's identities to their powers of seduction. The feminine is thus confined to appearance whereas the masculine is defined by action.

- It contributes to the degradation of romantic and other affective relationships by creating a disconnect between the body and affectivity, limiting women's desires to those of the other, reinforcing sexist stereotypes of the submissive and dependant woman, implying a relation between sexuality and pornography, and promoting a division between the sexes. Advertising perpetuates further confusion by conveying distorted messages of freedom and "girl power".

Youth and Advertising

Adolescents and young adults are particularly targeted by advertising; not only do they have considerable purchasing power already, they are also tomorrow's consumers. In order to reach them, advertisers regularly use the same tactics: undermining young girls' body image and positioning them as sexual objects, and tempting boys with rebel attitudes and physical force as illustrated by superhero physiques. Sexuality is presented to girls as a means to obtain other things: popularity, love, celebrity or independence -- this as long as their bodies remain the site for the exertion of boys' control, virility, and determination.

Scientific research indicates that exposure to sexual content in advertising and other media has an impact on adolescents' sexual behaviours. It not only creates unrealistic expectations with regards to physical appearance and sexual performance, it trivializes sexuality and detaches the physical from the relational and the affective. There is also a demonstrated link between early sexual relations and media sexualization; this is the case for advertisements as well as music videos and reality TV, to name but a few.

The Need to Act

The gravity of the current situation is not only due to the chauvinism driving sexist advertising. The relative tolerance and lack of public outcry – if not compliance – with which this phenomenon is met is particularly worrisome given that it constitutes a real threat to equality between men and women.

The fight against sexist advertising and the sexualization of public space cannot be achieved without addressing the social dynamics, systemic discrimination, and sexism that mark them. Only the genuine recognition of the concept of equality between the sexes has the potential to break down the discriminatory representations communicated through sexist advertising.

The effort required should not discourage or immobilize us into accepting the messages that tell us who we are and what we should desire, that treat women as objects, that eroticize and exaggerate gender relations. We must help women and men of all ages to develop their capacity to critique the messages they are confronted with in order to both resist and understand the potential impacts on their imaginations and behaviours.

Everyday resistance on the part of many is crucial. To quote the slogan proposed by the French students association *Les Sciences Potiches se rebellent* (a feminist student association): We know what we have left to do. [Sensitize our entourage], boycott, protest, refuse!

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Are Supergirls Super for Girls? The Negotiation of Beauty Ideals in Girl Power Cartoons

Rebecca Hains shares results from her long-term qualitative study of how 8 to 11 years old girls negotiate girlhood and the media.

In the 1990s, prominent books such as Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* raised public concern by arguing that as girls approach adolescence they face distinct problems; notably their self esteem and academic performance drop, and their concern with their appearance increases. Since then, numerous studies have indicated that the standards of beauty promoted by society and the media are a major factor in the development of these problems. Girl Power, as it is understood in the United States and Great Britain, emerged as a preventative response to this phenomenon. It was intended to empower preadolescent girls before they confront the crises of adolescence, convey positive messages about femininity and encourage girls to live their lives for their own satisfaction rather than to satisfy male desire.

The concrete incarnations of this Girl Power ethos, nevertheless, continue to be subject to dominant social constructs and representations of femininity. Girls still aspire to a specific appearance as they grow up: a face made up with cosmetics; long, straight, blonde hair and a slender body with long legs and shapely breasts. This is where the Girl Power message is ambiguous. Even though Girl Power television programs and cartoons, such as *The Powerpuff Girls*, *Totally Spies* or *My Life as a Teenage Robot* offer pre-adolescent viewers strong, smart and brave female role models, their bodies and personal styles vary little. Moreover, characters whose physical appearances do not conform are not bestowed hero status and are excluded from the Girl Power clique.

We must also put these programs in context and remember that their messages are in dialogue with all other social discourse about female beauty that pre-teens receive via the broader cultural environment in programs like *American Idol* or *The Swan*; in advertisements, music, toys and books; and through their own social circles. From these sources, girls quickly learn both the rules of normative female beauty and how to achieve it through clothing, makeup, accessories, diet strategies and plastic surgery.

If we consider that the scientific literature tells us that children's social learning from television has negative effects on their body image and self-esteem, what are the implications of the Girl Power's uncritical embrace and promotion of these standards of feminine beauty?

Searching for an answer to this question, a fieldwork study based on a feminist approach and inspired by a cultural studies¹ perspective was implemented. Two groups of pre-teen girls, ages 8 to 11, who lived near a major city on the east coast of the United States and who enjoyed watching Girl Power cartoons, were interviewed in a group setting twice a week over several months. Some of the girls were also met individually in their homes and all were observed during their lunch recess and library period.

Physical Appearance on Screen... and in Everyday Life

Several interconnected findings have emerged from this study regarding the process of negotiating²

1. Cultural Studies forms a trans-disciplinary research approach that draws from Sociology, Cultural Anthropology and Literary and Media Studies among others, to study social phenomena and cultural productions. In this perspective, culture and society are reciprocally influencing each other and contribute to shaping one another. Cultural Studies is usually associated with the Birmingham School and Stuart Hall, as well as with the Study of Media Representations, even though their fields of application are much broader today.

2. From a Cultural Studies perspective, the receiver is only rarely considered passive and the meaning he or she gets from media content is the product of a process of negotiation: the messages are interpreted not only in light of their very content and form, but also according to the viewer's life experience, ideas and values, among others.

feminine norms with Girl Power and the young viewers of the cartoons they inspire.

Firstly, the girls in the study had a hard time specifying what they liked about their Girl Power heroes' appearance, but they could easily critique in great detail the appearance of characters that deviated from the norm. They also seemed more inclined to empathize with regular characters with whom they identified, when their appearance unwillingly and temporarily failed to conform due to a villain's spell, for example. On the other hand, the girls made fun of non-recurring characters similarly afflicted with nonconforming appearances, going as far as blaming them for their condition when, in fact, they didn't have any more power over the situation than the heroes. This is a troublesome logic that girls could easily apply to real-world situations, such as obesity, especially since social learning theory suggests that the divide between the fantasy world and the real world is not as impenetrable as we may think.

The characters' physical appearance conveys their own messages, which compete with and contradict the intended lessons of girl power cartoon narratives, such as not judging people based on their appearance. When asked, the girls had trouble identifying and comprehending these lessons. This implies that for pre-teen viewers, visual stereotyping fuses together appearance and personality, reinforcing a contradictory message to viewers of these programs: that you *can* judge a book by its cover.

The girls were also quick to criticize the physical appearances of the girls and women around them if they did not correspond to established ideals. Unfortunately, they were also frequently criticized in the same way by their peers, and appeared to have absorbed the broader cultural messages about ideals of feminine beauty, even demonstrating a basic awareness of diet strategies and eating disorders. Consequently, the girls used the culture's ideal beauty standards to judge how well a female body measures up, including their own bodies. When turning these critical tools on themselves, they were harshly critical of their own appearances.

Given the broader cultural context, the idea of empowering girls through television seems like a Sisyphean task. Any progressive message contained in Girl Power cartoons are automatically drowned in a sea of images depicting our society's ideal of feminine beauty. It might help if Girl Power cartoons could avoid capitulating to the norm; but what would these cartoons look like, and could they succeed in the marketplace? Girls are so indoctrinated in normative femininity, and from such an early age, that they may not even be willing to watch a program where the heroes did not meet their high standards of physical appearance.

The situation might improve if producers created more girl-centered cartoons in which the girl heroes are not teenagers, but younger girls, more like the *Powerpuffs*. A study by Wardle and Watters (2004) revealed that 9-to-11-year-old girls who attended school with older girls had greater levels of body dissatisfaction than the girls who go to schools where the age difference between girls is not so great. If this is the case, the same social learning implications might apply to girls watching television programs that depict girls older than their target viewers. But there can be no easy answers. After all, aspirational viewing occurs across most segments of society, and tween girls are eager to get a taste of teenage life – a glimpse into their future. However, would girls be so eager to play at growing up if countless dollars were not thrown into the marketplace to persuade them to want to do so?

It seems that girls negotiate Girl Power in the same way that they negotiate the rest of our cultural environment, and Dialogic Theory can help us better understand this phenomenon. Most problems with Girl Power are not exclusive to Girl Power itself. For this reason, it is difficult to debate the merits of Girl Power cartoons themselves, for any girl who views them brings with her the biases and perspectives of the broader cultural environment with its views on feminine beauty ideals. As a result, Girl Power cartoons' deliberate messages about not judging people based on appearance are sometimes overwhelmed by what girls bring with them as they view their favourite programs, making the progressive content of such shows difficult for girls to understand, interpret or even detect.

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Screening Gender on Children's TV : Views of Producers around the World



Dafna Lemish describes her research with children's television producers, which probes the questions of what positive images we want to see on-screen and how we can make the necessary changes to put them in place. Her presentation emphasizes the importance of diversity and culture in our understanding of gendered representations.

What - and who - are children seeing when they watch?

There are a disproportionate number of male characters in film and television, and even leaders in children's programming, such as Sesame Street, are no exception. The packaging and merchandizing of programming and product lines are stereotypically gendered, as are the characters. In most of popular culture, distinct characteristics and preoccupations are attributed to boys (action, rational, solo, leader, adventure) and girls (appearance, emotional, group, follower, romance).

Initial research conducted by an international team headed by Maya Götz (IZI, Germany) and that Dafna Lemish was part of included 24 countries and 2,402 hours of children's television, 20,000 programs and 26,000 characters and has revealed international trends.

- In a representative sample, an average of only 32% of characters were female.
- In most countries no more than 20% of the programming children watch is produced domestically; most programming is coming from the western world; this underscores the ties between gender, diversity, culture, and equality.
- 72% of children's television characters are white. This is particularly significant to children of color who do not see themselves or their world represented in the images that they regularly watch.
- The majority of popular animated female figures are much thinner than the already unattainable, ideal body type that dominates western fashion.
- Animated girl characters throughout the world have disproportionately long legs; this is a marker of sexualization.
- Contemporary "Girl power" is presented as the power to look sexual and the power to shop.

What does gender equality mean to children's television producers around the world?

Since the answer to the question "What do we want to see?" couldn't be found in feminist literature nor in other critiques of representations in children's television, Dafna Lemish decided to do face-to-face interviews with television producers from around the world who could shed light on the issues. The project lasted four years and reached 135 producers from 65 countries.

Gender is not culturally neutral; equity and equality are defined in different ways depending on the context. Furthermore, trends in western situation comedies (for example the incompetent father) may target families, but are perceived as problematic in many cultures because they contradict accepted values and norms.

When producers were asked how we could use TV as a mobilizing force to promote gender equality, five major themes of gender as a cultural issue emerged:

- Promoting girls' schooling, particularly in rural areas around the world; there is a correlation between the education of girls and the well-being of their future families.
- Addressing domestic violence through representations of masculinity that are nurturing and caring; children need role models that challenge problematic constructions of what it means to be male.
- The sexism and racism inherent in the "beauty myth": disturbing trends amongst girls whose own appreciation for their skin colour and body types is undermined include eating disorders, nose straightening, skin whiteners, plastic surgery and padded bras for buttocks.
- HIV/AIDS education: promoting safe sex or abstinence is not sufficient; TV needs to challenge stigmatization and teach girls to protect themselves from rape.
- "Neglected boys": in certain areas of the world, boys are growing up without good male role models at home or in the school system. The options they turn to in popular culture are limited to immature or aggressive masculinity. It is therefore crucial to remember that gender issues affect us all; boys need to know that they can be a boy and a man in a variety of ways.

Strategies

- More equality in numbers (increase the number of female characters);
- Role reversals (for example boys cheering for an all-girls sports team);
- Boys and girls can have unique needs; we need to respect who they are in different ways, embrace their diversity and complexity, and avoid stereotypes;
- Continue to criticize the images we have and propose change that is proactive.

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Profit and Shame: Fighting Cultural Pedophilia

Shari Graydon shares stories of Media Action's activism, highlights important lessons learned, and proposes strategic elements that could be included in a public education and awareness campaign against cultural pedophilia.

While some may find the term cultural pedophile to be harsh, it can be argued that because, as a society, we have become so inured to the encroachment of sexually inappropriate commercial culture, provocative language is necessary. A Ghanaian proverb suggests that to the fish, the water is invisible. In contemporary global culture we are like fish, swimming in seas of media images that are culturally pornographic. It is not enough to teach people to be critical about pop culture; media literacy is but one means we have to address these problems. We need to replace the images we see.

Lessons learned through activism

Lesson 1: Consumer complaints make a difference

Many calls came to Media Action complaining about a sexualized billboard ad for jeans. One of these calls was from a mother of a four-year old girl who, upon seeing the billboard, asked her: "Mommy, why is that man hurting that woman?" Assuming that this young girl is lucky enough to live in a home environment safe from violence, she still gets the message that in our culture it is OK to put images of men hurting women on street corners and use them to sell jeans. Men and women receive the same message, and even if we're media literate, we don't process these types of ads intellectually. We experience them emotionally and viscerally. While we may deconstruct them after the fact, they remain part of the cumulative, unconscious socialization we all experience around what's normal and acceptable. And if we are media literate and recognize the damage that such images do, but fail to protest them, we're condoning the exploitation. We become complicit; in our silence we are saying, "this is image is fine with me, *c'est normal*."

As a result of Media Action's activism on behalf of those who complained, the billboards were removed. Removing billboard images can cost companies hundreds of thousands of dollars. Consumer complaints also educate companies about the type of images to avoid in the future in order to avoid losing money. Unfortunately, most consumers do not complain. Media Action's 1994 research with women consumers revealed that 80% of them were sometimes or often offended by sexist portrayals, but only 8% had ever written to the offending company, and only 13% had ever phoned. Before the Internet made this kind of activism easier, women didn't believe that complaining would make a difference. That said, more than half of the survey respondents said that they actively boycotted products, and 3/4 of them told their friends. Such actions have an impact, but if we don't communicate our intentions to boycott to the people who produce and disseminate the images, the problem persists. When enough of us tell media that their profits are in peril, things do change.

Lesson 2: Money talks: when profits are threatened, businesses listen

Some years ago, a radio station launched a contest called "The Breast Christmas Ever", offering free breast implants to the woman who was the most desperate to change her body. While the local feminist community was outraged and immediately protested directly to the station, the owners did nothing, because they correctly assumed that none of the protestors listened to their programming. Once the complaints were turned to the businesses that advertised on the station, including the University of Ottawa, the contest was cancelled within 48 hours.

Lesson 3: Industry bodies are slow to respond and mostly inclined to defend their members.

A 1992 advertisement for Obsession perfume featuring a nude, adolescent-looking Kate Moss resulted in the most complaints ever in Calvin Klein's history. Despite this, when Media Action made a formal complaint to Advertising Standards Canada, the regulator ruled the ad acceptable because the model was 22 years old. This is just one example of our view that regulatory bodies do not effectively police media industries. Their adjudications often take many months, and even if they do ultimately rule in consumers' favor, the ad campaign in question has often already runs its course. Another case in point is the length of time (three years) and the number of adjudications (at least three) – that it took for activists in Toronto to successfully get Howard Stern, a popular radio show host whose content was in contravention of regulatory guidelines from the start, off Canadian airwaves.

Lesson 4: Media makers and business have daughters too; Making the links explicit helps them to take responsibility.

A young woman artist-survivor contacted Media Action after seeing a television piece on the social context of a highly sexualized advertisement. She disclosed her experience of being gang-raped as a teenager, and stated that this type of ad caused her to have flashbacks – to essentially relive the trauma. With this woman's permission, Media Action contacted the ad agency rep who had previously defended the ad in question. After hearing the details of the woman's testimony, he stated that as a husband and father, he would change the way he approached his job in the future. The links between media practice and social contexts need to be made clear to companies and, when necessary, executives responsible need to be shamed into taking responsibility for their contribution to the continuum of sexual exploitation and cultural pedophilia.

Lesson 5: New media enable creative public engagement strategies and make it easier than ever to mobilize supporters.

Plasticassets.com is an award-winning hoax website that was designed to draw attention to issues relating to cosmetic breast implants: the rising rates of surgery, the underreported health impacts, and the risks to young women of unnecessary surgery. The site was created with the help of two young media producers in an attempt to raise awareness of these issues. The site ostensibly offered free breast implants to anyone applying for a Plastic Assets credit card. After a month and 130,000 visitors, the hoax was revealed. The site remains online as a public education and sensitization tool, with links to independent information about the health impacts of breast implants. New technologies offer exceptional opportunities to raise awareness and reach like-minded people. Furthermore, Youtube has shown us that compelling online messages that resonate with people can be simple and do not depend on elaborate projects like the one described.

A Draft Communication Strategy for Fighting Cultural Pedophilia

1. Survey of consumers' attitudes: this would require only three or four questions, directed at both men and women, that ask them how they feel about corporations sexualizing young people for profit. This would help to create a national consensus on the issues.
2. Business and entertainment leaders' endorsements: these people may have daughters, share our concerns, and be willing to publicly lead the way.
3. Open letters to corporate CEOs: cite public anger and research, demand change, make the social context clear, and ask them to take responsibility.
4. Compelling online campaign: broaden public awareness and support through social networking sites.
5. Traditional media coverage: leverage research, endorsements, letters, and online campaign.

In the early 1990s, Madonna launched her book *Sex*, which was wrapped in a way that did not allow consumers to see the images inside it until after the book had been purchased. At the same time, she posed for the cover of *Vanity Fair*. The spread inside the magazine featured her dressed as a girl, in various sexualized poses, in childlike contexts. In response to a newspaper commentary Shari Graydon wrote about the pictorial, a worker from a treatment centre for pedophiles called to say that this was precisely the kind of material that her centre could not have around, because offenders often use such images to justify their abuse of children and to sustain their belief that children are desirous of sexual contact.

We need to use real human stories like this one and connect real human consequences to the media that we're surrounded by. We need to give children an opportunity to be children, and as adults we bear a responsibility for protecting them from pedophilia, both individual and cultural.

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What can a girl do with a camera?

Highlighting recent experiences in participatory arts-based education, Claudia Mitchell reflects on the significance of the visual in girlhood studies.

A lot has been heard about what producers and advertisers can do with cameras. Asking what a girl can do with a camera considers how media making by girls and young women can empower them and allow us to better understand how they are seeing the issues that affect their lives.

Cameras rarely venture beneath the surface of global issues to examine the hidden impacts on, and disproportionate vulnerability of, girls and women. Even more rarely is it girls and women themselves controlling the cameras that do so. What does it mean for girls and young women to produce images that they think are critical to be seen around the world?

Theoretically, Mitchell situates her work in four broad areas:

1. Media studies / Youth as cultural producers (Lankshear, Buckingham): What does it mean to be the person or people to produce the knowledge and to have the control over it?
2. Girl-making (Bloustein, Kearney): As media-makers, how do girls and young women produce themselves through photos, documentaries and films about their own lives?
3. Feminist media studies / the notion of the gaze (Spence, Mulvey, Skaggs): What does it mean when girls and young women control that gaze?
4. Policy making / the construction of meaning (Wang, etc): How can girls and young women shape what happens and how people see the particular issues that they think are important?

These questions are explored in practice through the participatory arts-based approach of the Centre for Visual Methodologies for Social Change and the related International Visual Methodologies for Social Change Project. Described below is a selection of video and photovoice workshops with young people that speak to their potential impacts on the lives of girls.

Video

Participatory video workshops encompass the whole film making cycle – learning to look through the lens, learning the technology, writing scripts, and producing both with, and as, the audience of the film. One project in particular allows participants to produce a 2-3 minutes un-edited documentary in one day.

“South-North lessons” take activities and approaches successful in rural schools in South Africa and Rwanda and applies them to local classrooms.

Over three years of video workshops with young people in these countries, participants overwhelmingly chose the themes of HIV-AIDS and gender violence when asked to make a video about something that is important in their lives. Street fear, incest, rape, and teen pregnancy are all examples of subjects emerging from gender-specific workshops.

The workshops allow girls and young women to take hold of the camera and dramatize something that they can talk about, reflect on, propose other endings for, and determine amongst themselves who else should see it – clergy, parents, boys in their schools, etc. - and why.

Photovoice

Using disposable, point and shoot, or digital camera, photovoice offers a lower tech option for girls and young women to visually represent things that are important to them. As with video, girls commonly take a collaborative approach to producing their images, and experience has shown that when participants caption their photos by hand, viewers look more intensively.

“Feeling safe / not so safe” and “feeling strong / not so strong” are the prompts most commonly used in these photovoice projects. It has proved to be fascinating prompts because it does not force participants to say what they don’t want to - allowing them to be both playful or go into the issues in a meaningful and in-depth way if they so choose. Exhibiting participants’ photos between countries has also allowed participants to enter into another kind of dialogue that allows girls to look at each others’ lives and examine how and why things may be different for them.

Recent projects demonstrate how the visual is an entry point to policy change, and that girls voices are critical to social change. In Rwanda, participants took photos in front of sports heroes’ homes as places where they felt unsafe. At the same time, UNICEF was spearheading a public education campaign that included sports stars speaking out against gender-based violence. The girls’ photos and accompanying captions caused UNICEF workers to re-examine their campaign and to ensure campaign representatives were not in fact perpetrators themselves.

In Swaziland, grade 7 girls took pictures of the school toilets in response to the same prompt. Upon seeing the displayed photos, teachers asked why – while they knew the toilets were in a bad state, they hadn’t realized that the girls felt at risk using them because of their remote location and the possibility that potential attackers could be lurking. As a result of seeing the photos, teachers began monitoring the toilets during school time. This is another example of how girls can see that what they do can produce results.

In a Montreal workshop, a girl took a picture of slippers and commented that her stepfather hit her with them. This raised a variety of ethical questions and concerns – should the photo be included in the exhibition, how could teachers use the photo as a point of departure for an intervention, and in what ways photos can be understood as a plea for help on the part of the young people that take them.

A final example demonstrates how a positive photo can be impetus for increased awareness and changes in adults’ perceptions and behaviors. In this case, a group of participants took a photograph of a girl sitting in the middle of a classroom as a place where she feels safe. Particularly in areas where schools are commonly perceived as places where girls are at risk, the notion that school may also be the only safe place for girls is an important one for educators to reflect and act on.

Emerging questions:

How do we ensure sure girls’ work is seen? What is the role of adults and community workers in this process?

What are the tools we use to read girls’ work? How do girls themselves analyze the images they produce?

What is it about cultural production that is so powerful? Why is producing something such a critical piece of the reflexive process?

How do we make stronger links between girlhood, technology, and participatory culture?

What are the related ethical issues? When might girls be put in a more vulnerable position, how do we think about this kind of work, and what kind of protection is built into it?

How does this work add to our understanding of feminist visual culture?

Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal put girls at the centre of research and action, engaging in feminist work that is for, with and by girls. How does media making and production help us think about the issues in a broader way as researchers, as activists, and as mothers, who work alongside young women?

How can deepening our understanding of this work help us to think about the lives of girls and young women, and help them to see how their work can make a real difference in their lives?

To answer the question what can a girl do with a camera? *A lot.*

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Packaging Girlhood and the Sexualization of Girls



Sharon Lamb describes findings from two projects: the book *Packaging Girlhood* and the Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, both of which she is a co-author.

Packaging Girlhood

Packaging Girlhood was inspired in part by experience teaching college courses in gender issues and psychology. Students, most of whom were young women, were challenged to do gender analyses of the representations, packaging, and messages associated with everyday cultural products such as toys, media, food, etc.

The content of the book itself was drawn from a survey of 600 girls who were asked to name the “stuff” in their world – books, TV, movies, music, and clothes, as well as where they liked to shop, and what they liked to do. *Packaging Girlhood* is the content analysis of the survey results, some details of which are described below.

The cultural products that girls consume generally offer two ways for girls to be – “for the boys” or “one of the boys” (girly-girl or tomboy). The complexity of girls’ real identities works against the aims of marketers; they need to sell stereotypes in order to sell more of their products.

Marketers use an illusion of choice, whereby they create the same product in different varieties in order to reach a broader audience. Marketers also use techniques referred to in psychological theory as reactance theory. They tempt young consumers with what they may want but can’t have, thereby setting them up in opposition to their parents who are most commonly the ones saying no. They also sell teen items to younger and younger girls.

The various media for girls reflect the contemporary misuse of the term Girl Power. In contrast with the original idea (which dates back to the 70’s), that girls could enter into activities and academic areas that were previously forbidden to them, the new Girl Power is the power to shop, to attract boys, and to choose what type of girl to be from the narrow set of stereotypes offered to them.

Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls

The task force was set up in order to look at the sexualization of girls. Its charge was to examine scientific evidence for the phenomenon, determine if it had increased, examine its causes, and whether any harm resulted. Limited to published studies, the authors analyzed academic research and journalistic coverage. They looked at multiple sources of sexualization: societal and interpersonal contributions, and self-sexualization.

The taskforce defined sexualization in four parts:

1. When a person’s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour to the exclusion of other characteristics;
2. When a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness with being sexy;
3. When a person is made into a thing for others’ sexual use rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making;
4. When sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person.

Age compression involves older women being made to look younger and vice versa - younger girls made to look older. The Task Force's review of research revealed that there were in fact few media or marketing examples of little girls made to look like sex objects, which was the popular perception held by journalists and one that they were most concerned about.

More common was the ways in which images of sexy women and teens pressure young girls to self-sexualize. Girls themselves are not presented as sex objects on TV or in advertising, but teens and women in girls' programming are. Using the example of the Bratz dolls, we see that the producers and marketers sell girls a look that describes teens as fashionable and "hot" as well as scenarios that teach young girls that teenagers mainly party, drink, and shop. This strategy is denied by company representatives, but clearly takes advantage of the very common tendency for girls to look up to and want to imitate teens and young women. Music lyrics and videos do the same.

Self-sexualization is a complex phrase to use because it risks implying that girls are to blame in a culture where they are invited everyday to eroticize themselves. It is rewarding, and becomes a kind of currency. The example of a high school girls' field hockey team who chose to use the phrase "We bend over for 90 minutes in 11 different positions" to promote their sport demonstrates how they pick up on how marketers advertise to them.

Exposure to - and more significantly, buying into - beauty ideals affects girls in many ways. Self-sexualization has consequences for both physical and mental health - body dissatisfaction, depression, lower athletic and academic performance, and low self-esteem and sexual assertiveness, among other things. Researchers are also concerned about what is described as slippage - the portrayal of women as sexualized little girls which may create a new ethos of what is appropriate sexuality for men (ex. "barely legal" pornography).

Strategies

The overriding message of *Packaging Girlhood* is that because we can't turn off the world of marketing and media, girls need to learn to read it. When girls are able to critique these images, they can develop a resistance to them.

Challenging the sexualization of girls therefore requires media literacy, education for boys, and sex education that includes "the three m's" - morality, media, and mutuality. This would allow us to reclaim values and meanings around sexuality.

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The Princess Trap : The Commercialization of Play as an Obstacle to Self-Realization for Young Girls

Susan Linn, Ed.D., examines the sexualization of girls as part of the broader commercialization of childhood and the escalation of advertising and marketing in the lives of children.

The Everyday Proliferation of Corporate Images

We cannot talk about any issues related to media and children, including sexualization, unless we talk about commercialization as well. In 1983 in the US, companies spent about \$100 million annually marketing to children. Today, they spend \$17 billion annually, which is an increase of 170 times in 26 years. The marketing that we knew is not the same as what children are used to today. Moreover, research shows that marketing is a factor in many public health problems – sexualization, childhood obesity, eating disorders, youth violence, family stress, the acquisition of materialistic values, and the erosion of children’s creative play. This last impact is discussed in detail below.

The unprecedented conversion of ubiquitous, miniaturized, and sophisticated media, and unfettered and unregulated commercialism is a disaster for children’s creative play. This has a powerful effect on girls because children tend to play out what they see in the media. What used to be time for exploration, a way to try out different roles, is now a time to regurgitate what one sees on the screen.

Media is not inherently bad for children, but screen media in particular is a strong memory cue. We tend to remember what we see, which is not conducive to creativity. While media has had a positive impact on many people with regards to fantasy play, current media culture distinguishes itself in terms of access – repeated images permeate kids’ lives. In the past, if a child wanted to evoke the joy they derived from a particular story, they relied on their imagination to do so. Today, films and television programs permeate children’s lives - the same story repeatedly as well as perpetual sequels - from a multitude of locations and sources: at home, on mp3 players, from the back seat of the car, and cell phones. At the same time, the toys with which they play are derived from these very films and programs - there are over 40,000 Disney princess items on the market today.

We pass our values on to our children by the stories and the toys we give them. If the stories we are telling them are controlled by two or three corporations – who are also marketing them their toys - we are constricting children’s lives and their image of what it means to be a girl or woman. When we feed children these images from the time they are very young, their idea of what’s possible in the world can be constricted before they are out of the cradle; you can bring your daughter home to a Disney princess nursery when she is a baby, buy her Disney princess videos when she is a child and, when she grows into adulthood, offer her a Disney princess wedding gown.

Mobilizing the Public Through Activism

An activist approach tackles the commercialization of childhood, including the sexualization of little girls, beyond traditional learning environments like home or school to a societal level. Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (CCFC) has taken on a lot of companies about issues affecting girls. For instance, in response to the American Toy Association’s TOTY (Toy of the Year) Awards, the CCFC organized the TOADY (Toys Oppressive And Destructive to Young Children) Awards. Five toys were nominated, and after over 12,000 votes, the 2008 winner was The Dallas Cowboy Cheerleader Barbie. Another recent action was a successful letter writing campaign during which time over 5000 people contacted Scholastic, Inc. asking them to stop marketing the Bratz Brand in schools.

CCFC's activism is highly publicized, and these examples underscore the importance of a good relationship with the press for raising public awareness. The public is asleep on this issue, which can be particularly difficult to explain - not only sexualization, but also the internalized racist and classist messages embedded in children's films and toys.

A Question of Rights and Freedoms

Children should have the right to grow up, and parents the freedom to raise them, without being undermined by commercial interests and greed. Most companies are not likely to change their strategies because we ask them to, because what they do sells. In the US in particular, they cannot stop because they are legally bound to make a profit for their stockholders. Therefore the government needs to push back; we need to push for policy change. For example, television marketing to children under 13 years of age is banned in Quebec.

Direct activism still has its place, however, even in a world where companies compete with each other by being more outrageous than the next. After just three days of CCFC campaigning, Hasbro pulled the idea for the production of Pusycat Cat Dolls toys (based on the burlesque troupe turned singing group known for their highly sexualized songs and dances) for girls aged six to nine.

We can work to change society and also help the children in our lives. The American Pediatrics Association recommends no screen time for children under two and limiting screen time as much as possible for young children. But, if our little girls are immersed in the princesses, we have to let them play. That said, we don't have to buy them Disney paraphernalia and, if we are playing with them, we can move the play a little bit. We all have the power to offer alternative ends to any story, including one in which it is the princess who rescues the prince.

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ROUND TABLES



Round Table Discussions - Summaries

**Two groups were formed (an English-speaking group and a French-speaking group) for round table discussions of a list of questions (shown here under and distributed ahead of time) and possible solutions. The two groups then reconvened as a single group and the ideas raised were shared and discussed by all.*

Questions asked

- ↳ There appears to be an emerging social consensus about sexualization as a problematic issue. Do you agree? How can the analysis be deepened with a goal of finding better prevention and sensitization strategies?
- ↳ How do you think minority youth (both girls and boys) are affected?
- ↳ Teens and preteens are often very critical of stereotypical media portrayals and declare not being affected. How can they be moved beyond discourse?
- ↳ What are the aesthetic and psychological counter-models that can be promoted to young people concerning sexuality and its media representation?
- ↳ Do sexualized media portrayals have the same effect on children and youth than real life models?
- ↳ We know the main impact of sexualization on girls. What is your assessment of the impact on boys? How do you think boys' perception of love and of women is affected by these portrayals?
- ↳ How can we engage media professionals in these issues and influence their creative choices?
- ↳ What is the responsibility of the State, regarding sexualization?
- ↳ What kind of strategies should be favoured in order to counter the current trivialization of sexuality?
- ↳ How would you define healthy and egalitarian relationships? How can those models be promoted?
- ↳ What constitutes healthy sexuality? What kind of education is needed for what kind of sexuality?

Round table of French-speaking panelists

The discussions at this table focused mainly on the first of the distributed questions. The panelists talked about whether there is the beginning in Quebec of a consensus that sexualization is problematic.

According to the participants, the sexualization of public space is definitely recognized, but there is persistent resistance to its identification as problematic. Not only there is no consensus on this, but some panelists felt that sexualization is generally viewed favourably. Though the sexualization of children is generally condemned, the panelists believe that putting the focus on the sexualization of children implicitly condones the sexualization of adult women.

The participants also looked at sexualization in the context of larger social systems and issues. Sexualization was seen as inscribed in contemporary patriarchal and capitalist systems, and in the construction and reproduction of gender and sex relations as well as the power relations at play within them.



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The participants agreed on the need to identify sexism as one of sources of the problem with sexualization. They also agreed, accordingly, on the importance of developing a suitable and applicable definition of sexism.

Among the solutions discussed, much attention was given to the importance of raising awareness of the problem among young people, and even more so of the need to offer the majority of young people, who reject and are critical of the discourse and images of sexualization, a place for discussion that can break the isolation they feel under the pressure of the social imperative of sexualization. This proposal led to a discussion of the need for sexual education, unfortunately removed from Quebec's school curriculum. The panelists said they would also like to see some type of coalition where individuals and organizations can get together to continue the discussion, take positions and act.

Last, the question of government intervention was discussed. There was consensus on the desirability of proactive regulation of the sexualization of public space.

Round table of English-speaking panelists

The panelists of the English-speaking round table also identified sexualization as the tip of an iceberg at the intersection of more general social problems.

The participants wondered if the sexualization of girls might not be a response to the gaping hole left by our society's refusal to offer sexual education and to discuss sexuality.

They also discussed the relationship between sexualization and marketing or commercialization, even, of children. Acknowledging the relevance of questioning patriarchal structures that contribute to the development of this phenomenon, the panelists nonetheless sought to determine who profits, in every sense of the word, from this situation.

The theme of diversity also came up in the discussions. Not only did the participants agree on the importance of ensuring diversity of representations and perspectives, they also recognized that the problem of sexualization must be seen in relation to the whole question of race relations and inequalities.

Some of the discussion also focused on boys. The participants said that care should be taken not to neglect boys in focusing on the sexualization of girls - especially as real social change is impossible, in their opinion, unless everyone, boys and girls, is considered in an inclusive examination of the issues. The question of integrating boys in discussion and action, however, brought up the issue of priorities. Might it not be better to continue to focus, as a first step, on working with girls?

The question of target audiences for different interventions was also raised, but there was no time to discuss it in detail. The participants did nonetheless agree on the need to attack the problem of sexualization on different fronts and to adapt the approach and language to the public addressed - marketing professionals and image creators, parents, educators or children and adolescents.

Problems with definitions came up in the discussions, especially in regards to the concept of childhood. The participants had difficulty defining who exactly the "sexualization of children" refers to. Does it mean minors, for example? Age of consent or majority varies not only from one province or state to the next, but also depending on the context - voting or consenting to sexual relations, for example. Should we then be using psychological

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guidelines instead to determine who is a child, based on development? No definitive answer to these questions was found, but it did lead the panelists to see an interconnection between the sexualization of girls and the sexualization of women.

These discussions also led the participants to consider the sociological notion of agency and the possibility of building alliances based on this concept with people working in other areas of research and action - tackling obesity, for example.

Sharing ideas: discussions and action proposals

In sharing their ideas, the two groups found that their discussions highlighted similar concerns, even though they approached the issues from different perspectives and angles. This was a good basis for continuing the discussion.

In terms of seeing the problem of sexualization as part of larger systems stemming from the development of patriarchy and capitalism, the sharing of ideas highlighted the persistence of structures that prevent women from moving past the notion that it is a woman's responsibility to avoid the male gaze. From this perspective, sexualization can be considered the contemporary incarnation of a sexism which has been resurrected through structures which have survived despite feminism's gains in particular areas.

The discussion about the interlinking of sexualization and other problems also led participants to consider ways that sexualization affects different groups, in particular women of ethnic minorities. The overrepresentation of certain ethnic groups in the sex industry, for example, demonstrates the intersection of racism and sexualization.

These considerations led to an affirmation of the need for a holistic approach. For example, sexual education courses should be part of a larger framework of courses in human relations that would look at sexism, racism, classism and their intertextuality. It was also mentioned that sexual education is too often strictly informational, without an ethical perspective that could open the door to discussion of intimacy, mutuality, fairness and respect in sexual relations. Also mentioned was a concern about giving young people images and models that respond to their desire to feel attractive and desired without lapsing into stereotypes or oppressive and limiting patterns.

One participant said she was concerned to see appearing, in reaction to sexualization and the criticisms of it, a glorification of modesty linked to religious and political discourses which are also part of oppressive systems. The reaction of participants to this concern was mixed, many mentioning the importance of maintaining fundamental distinctions to prevent the confusion and false equations that come from linking very different phenomena. Patriarchy and sexualization, for example, are not equivalent, though they are closely linked. This discussion nonetheless highlighted the difficulty of reconciling a universalist feminism with cultural diversity and a recognition of each person's presumed ability to determine his or her own conduct.

The liveliest exchanges were about distinguishing between the sexualization of children and young people and the sexualization of adult women.

Strategically, this distinction seemed a good way to break the illusion of a generalized acceptance of sexualization, by emphasizing the consensus on opposition to the sexualization of children. On the other hand, making this distinction seems to feed into conservative discourses that, for example, construct innocent children who must be saved in opposition to blameworthy young women who must be held accountable.



ROUNDTABLES

All participants agreed that children need special attention and protection as developing beings that are specific targets of marketing and commercialization. Many, nonetheless, said that the distinction could prove counter-productive, as to some extent it effaces processes and spaces linking the world of the child and that of the adult. In fact, even very young children have access to content meant for adults, whom they also watch and try to imitate. Mechanisms can also be triggered in childhood or adolescence that contribute to the development of tomorrow's adult. The shared symbols and universes of the child and the adult, a coming together probably accentuated by the current cult of youth, seem to support the need for a veritable chain of interventions adapted to the different publics affected by the problem.

The importance of a multi-faceted strategy was reinforced by the remarks of one participant on the limitations of approaching the issue in terms of protection: consider the historical evolution of the legal notion of pornography, which postulates an object of protection that is constantly changing in response to social transformations. In other words, we must change the paradigm: focusing on equality rather than protection seems a more fruitful approach. Then it is no longer a question of who we should protect first but rather who we should speak to first. And here, young people are at the top of the list, as they have yet to construct their opinions and determine how they want to present themselves.

If we are to avoid reproducing archetypes detrimental to the development of real equality, we need a perspective that sees sexualization as a general social problem touching us all rather than a problem affecting a particular sector of the population as defined by another group, that has the power to do so.

The participants, accordingly, believe we need an approach that both ensures protection of the very young and leads adults to themselves reject the barrage of images and the pressure that comes with the sexualization of public space.

At the end of the activity, participants had to propose actions to combat sexualization. Suggestions were made in addition to the proposals already discussed in the French-speaking and English-speaking groups, many of them clearly showing a need to share and exchange knowledge, experience and points of view so the reflection and mobilization can continue. One suggestion, for example, called for development of networks for exchanges among researchers in different academic fields and language communities who are looking at related problems and also between the research world and community groups and militants. Along the same lines, many participants said they would like to create spaces for exchange of ideas and sharing of knowledge among all who are uncomfortable with the phenomenon of sexualization.

Many proposals also addressed the need to include young people in the discussion and in actions taken - in the classroom, in forums or through initiatives that allow them to formulate their own critiques of sexualization and communicate them in their own way.

It was also suggested that a law be introduced prohibiting sexism - like existing legislation prohibiting racism or anti-Semitism, for example - and that it be based on prior work to define sexism in a way that allows application of such legislation. The purpose of the law would be to allow legal complaints to be made, which would give rise to debate and greater public awareness, which in turn could facilitate the fight against sexism. It was also suggested that the problem could be tackled legally as a form of sexual harassment and that this could facilitate intervention with respect to different institutions.

Last, a number of concrete actions were proposed, everything from product boycotts to public service ad

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campaigns and awareness-building among leaders in the cosmetic industry, which plays a major role in the sexualization of public space through the images it propagates. Other recommendations included continued efforts to educate the media and making use of the mobilization, awareness-building and sharing opportunities offered by Web 2.0 digital technologies.