

The larger study ... is part of a Canadian-South African partnership exploring sexual violence (effects and solutions) using PAR with Indigenous girls and the impact this work can have on changing policy and community in relation to safety and security. Canada and South Africa have both come under scrutiny by organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the United Nations for not creating safe, secure environments for young women.

In Canada:

- Commercial sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls and women forms more than 90% of the visible sex trade⁵.
- Indigenous women and children are being trafficked in the sex and drug trades⁴.
- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has noted Canadian government breaches of the Convention including the high levels of violence against Indigenous girls¹.
- There is an estimated 25–50% child sexual abuse prevalence rate in Indigenous adults².
- Indigenous women are 8x more likely than non-Indigenous women to be killed by an intimate partner³.
- Indigenous women are made vulnerable by: colonization, patriarchy, racism, and sexism; residential schools; historical trauma; Bill C-31 that determines Indian status and related compensation, infrastructure, support, and access to community of origins.

We are 9 young women from Eskasoni (aged 18-23) who are doing this research in Eskasoni, partnering with Eskasoni Mental Health Services and an academic researcher.

Our Community...

- Is the Eskasoni First Nation is a band government of the Mi'kmaq
- Is located alongside the Bras d'Or Lake in the Unama'ki district of Mi'kmaq territory (Nova Scotia, Canada).
- Is the largest Indigenous community in Atlantic Canada with approximately 3,752 people on-Reserve and 660 off-Reserve or on other Reserves.
- Struggles with the legacy of colonialism and settler government legislation aimed at cultural genocide. The intergenerational trauma experienced by our community is reflected in significantly higher rates of mental health concerns, substance abuse, suicides as well as domestic and sexual violence.

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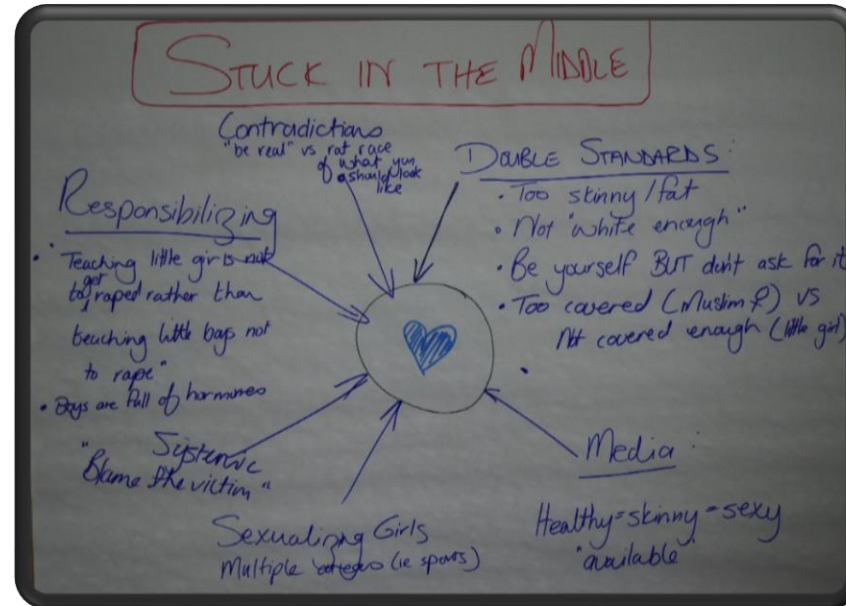


Eskasoni



Stuck in the middle:

The role of media in victimising women



Method

This study uses... the principles of indigeneity, decolonizing methodologies⁶ and has a rights-based social justice agenda together with participatory reflective approaches that help us learn 'from the ground up'⁷.

In the first phase of our research we have focused on several issues, but here we focus on the findings of a collage activity exploring perceptions of Indigenous girls and women both within our community and the broader Canadian context. We worked in teams of 2 - 3 participants, then shared our collages with the full group, explaining why we selected images & phrases, followed by a larger group discussion. The role of the media was prevalent in these discussions and the ways in which depictions of women shape local and broader perceptions of Indigenous women and how this impacts girls in particular.

Findings

- The media shapes the dominant discourse of female sexuality and gender roles in core ways:
- The media equates [healthy = skinny = sexy] and suggests [healthy = skinny = sexy] means girls and women are available.
 - The objectification and sexualisation of young women is pervasive in the media and occurs across advertising, news and sports reporting etc.
 - Double standards for women, where representations of body size (too skinny vs. too fat), skin pigmentations (not white enough), and beauty ("embrace your face" by using cosmetics to alter who you are) leave women in an impossible situation.
 - These double standards impact public discussions where for example, women are too covered (e.g. Muslim women) or not covered enough (school policies and action targeting the dress of girls at increasingly younger ages).
 - Double standards intersect with the responsabilization of girls and women, where girls are encouraged to "be themselves" but "asked for it" when they are assaulted; where girls are taught "how not to get raped", but we fail to teach boys how to treat girls with respect. And where violent behavior by boys is usually excused and justified.
- Additionally, the media plays a key role in perpetrating racial stereotypes of Indigenous peoples in Canada, and the subsequent ways in which Indigenous girls and women are treated:
- News reporting focuses almost exclusively on bad news stories, ignoring community successes and celebrations. Additionally, stories are very seldom contextualized, perpetuating racial stigmas.
 - As stigmas are perpetuated so too is the notion of "the savage squaw" and sexual availability of Indigenous women.
 - By ignoring the successes and celebrations of Indigenous peoples, youth are left without publically recognized positive and culturally relevant role models.

References

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