Module 6:
Violence Against Women & Children: Media Literacy Case Studies

| Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21st Century

introduction

This unit aims to develop critical media literacy skills, by:

- examining the sexual assault case involving a female Muslim student at C.W. Jefferys School

- looking at the media coverage of the case and highlighting the stereotypes of Muslim women in the media

- discussing orientalism and the exoticizing of Muslim women

This unit also highlights the implications for the role of teachers and school administrators in such cases, and discusses issues relating to safe schools.

background to the case

- On May 23, 2007, Jordan Manners, a 15-year-old Grade 9 student, was shot and killed while attending C.W. Jefferys Collegiate in Toronto. Two 17-year-olds were arrested and charged with first-degree murder. The shooting received national media attention as the first fatal school shooting (primary and secondary grades) in Toronto's history.

- As a result of the murder, Premier Dalton McGuinty launched a public inquiry to study youth violence, while human rights lawyer Julian Falconer headed a study examining school safety.

- During the inquiry, which looked at the conditions at C.W. Jefferys, allegations emerged of unreported sexual assaults targeting Muslim female students. After further investigation, the Toronto police arrested 6 male students for an alleged sexual assault against a Muslim female student at the school. The police also charged the school's former principal and two former vice-principals under the Ontario Child and Family Services Act for failing to report the alleged incident. However, charges against the youths and school administrators were later dropped because too much time had elapsed between the alleged assault and the charges.

violence in schools

- In North America there have been many incidents of violence in schools and on campuses. Most notable has been the large-scale physical violence:

    - University of Texas (1966)

    - Columbine High School (1999)

- In many cases the violence has been directed specifically against women, and is rooted in sexism:

    - École Polytechnique Massacre (1989)

    - Virginia Tech massacre (2007)

violence in schools

Violence has the effect or potential effect of hurting the health and welfare of an individual. It can be physical, verbal (oral or written), emotional, sexual, or racial, and can be directed against one individual or a group of individuals…It is important that in responding to [violent] incidents, schools investigate and address the underlying causes, as well as deal immediately with the incident itself.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (1994). Violence-Free Schools Policy.
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/vfreeng.html#Implementation

safe schools

- The school environment is both physical and social. It includes the school building, its surroundings, the people in it and the way they interact, the material resources, and the extensions of this environment that are necessary for the delivery of the program (e.g., field trips, school buses) and extracurricular activities. The school environment must be welcoming to everyone learning and working in it. Actions that threaten the school environment, such as intimidation by groups or the distribution of hate literature, must be addressed by schools and school boards to avoid creating a climate of fear and further violence. The school environment must also be safe so that learning can take place.

- School boards and schools should consider the elements of a safe, welcoming, violence-free environment that promote a sense of belonging, including assurance that:

  - physical, verbal (oral or written), sexual, or psychological abuse; bullying; or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, religion, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation, or other attributes such as income or appearance is deemed unacceptable behaviour on the part of any member of the school community;

safe schools

– positive behaviour is acknowledged and rewarded, and modelled by all staff;

– discipline strategies are fair and non-violent and focus on teaching students about appropriate behaviours while maintaining their self-respect;

– a sense of responsibility, empowerment, and ownership is encouraged by all members of the school community;

– achievement and wellness are fostered for all students;

– wide participation in extracurricular activities by all students is encouraged;

– parental involvement and community participation are invited.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (1994). Violence-Free Schools Policy.
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/vfreeng.html#Implementation

safe schools?

- The Ontario Safe Schools Act was enacted in 2000. It included a zero tolerance policy.

- This policy identified inappropriate behaviours and specific punishments, including a greater use of suspensions and expulsions, which lead to greater involvement of police (E. Lawson, 2003).

- The zero tolerance policy resulted in a disproportionate number of racial-minority students, particularly black male students, being expelled and suspended.

- The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) was taken to the Ontario Human Rights Commission on the grounds that the TDSB's interpretation of this policy was a form of racial profiling.

- The TDSB accepted and acknowledged a widespread perception that the application of Ontario's school disciplinary legislation, regulations and policies can have discriminatory effect on students from racial-minority communities and students with disabilities, and can worsen their already disadvantaged position in society. The zero tolerance policy was later dismantled.
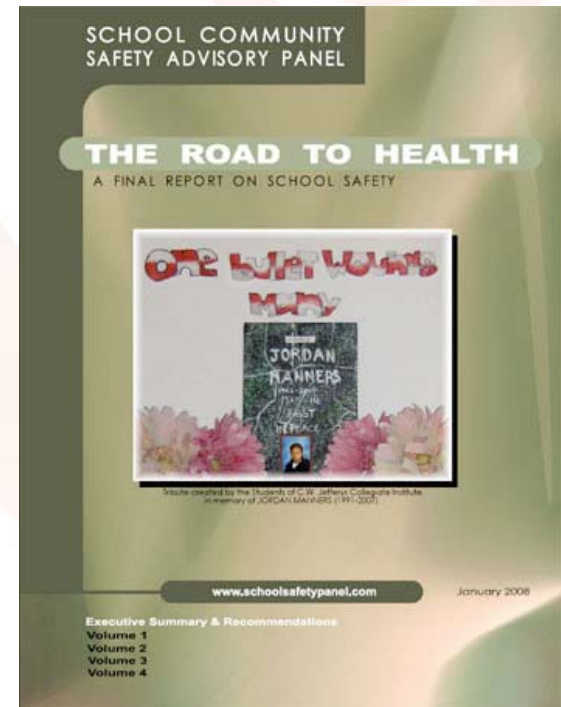
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safe schools?

- Do you think this policy was a factor in how the case of sexual assault of the Muslim student at C.W. Jefferys was handled?

- How does the definition of schools as safe spaces conflict with the violence that takes place in these spaces?

- How can schools be made unsafe spaces?

- What forms of violence can take place in schools?

- What is the relationship between home and school spaces?

safe schools?

- In the inquiry following Manners' death, the School Community Safety Advisory Panel's preliminary report raised concerns around the safety of visible minority female students.

- On July 6, 2007, in response to statements of community concern, the TDSB asked the panel to ensure that its Terms of Reference included "the particular risks to the safety of female visible minority students that may exist within our schools."

SCHOOL COMMUNITY
SAFETY ADVISORY PANEL

THE ROAD TO HEALTH
A FINAL REPORT ON SCHOOL SAFETY

JORDAN MANNERS

www.schoolsafetypanel.com   January 2008

Executive Summary & Recommendations
Volume 1
Volume 2
Volume 3
Volume 4

mainstream media coverage of the case

http://www.thestar.com/article/291584

http://www.thestar.com/article/470240

http://www.thestar.com/article/231218

http://montreal.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20070919/jefferys_arrest_070919hub=MontrealHome949

http://www.canada.com/topics/news/story.html?id=d88ea8ee-55e7-4d9e-9e50-7e3538ebc67c

http://www.owjn.org/owjn_2009/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=54&Itemid=67

http://www.citytv.com/toronto/citynews/news/local/article/19683--an-utter-failure-panel-blames-culture-of-fear-punishments-and-politics-for-toronto-school-violence

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mainstream media coverage of the case

Some female students at the school believed Grade 9 girls were being targeted by a group of boys for being unpopular or shy.

http://www.thestar.com/article/470240

She was "apparently chosen because (Muslims) are less likely to report it, because of their strict parents" and cultural taboos, said a source.

http://www.thestar.com/article/231218

The board asked the panel to look into speculation that girls were being targeted because of their religion and ethnic background, which made them less likely to report abuse for fear of reprisal at home.

http://www.thestar.com/article/470240

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mainstream media coverage of the case

- Whose voices are present and whose are absent in the media coverage of the case of sexual assault of a young Muslim female student at C.W. Jefferys?

- What assumptions are being made about the different parties involved?

- Why do you think the Jordan Manners shooting overshadowed the alleged sexual assault case?

representations of Muslims
in the mainstream media

- How have Muslim men, women, girls, boys and families been represented in mainstream media?

    - YouTube - MOOZ-lum –Trailer http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4axp5V_j6E

    - YouTube - Towelhead –Trailer http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92_gGB5U3Pg

    - YouTube - The Stoning of Soraya M – Trailer http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWbdn5YfMJs

- Think of other examples of mainstream media that depict Muslims using stereotypes.

- What consequences do you think these dominant representations and images would have on Muslim girls and Muslim families, particularly with regard to their relationship with schools?

saving Muslim women?

- The images of extreme repression and violence that Muslim women experience at the hands of fundamentalist Islamic regimes are used by Western media to build a homogenous identity of Muslim women as oppressed and in need of being saved from their violent, patriarchal religion and culture.

- How has the absence of counter images and narratives (that depict Muslim women in a positive light and as strong and empowered) contributed to a one-dimensional image of Muslim women?

http://iranpoliticsclub.net/photos/women-stoning/index.htm

www.terrorismawareness.org/images/43tt.jpg

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saving Muslim women?

- Do you think the dominant image and narrative of Muslim women as oppressed and in need of being saved from their violent, patriarchal religion and culture could have contributed to the decision by C.W. Jefferys' administrators to not report the alleged sexual-assault incident to the girls' parents?

http://islamizationwatch.blogspot.com/2010/02/malaysia-truly-arabia-says-muslim-women.html

the "oppressed Muslim women" identity

- What messages does the figure on the left convey?

- What messages does the figure on the right convey?

- Why do you think these two pictures are positioned side-by-side?

orientalism & the exoticizing of Muslim women

- Edward Said used the term orientalism to define the way the Western world negatively views Muslims to maintain its own superiority. Orientalist thinking often includes the exoticizing of Muslim women in various ways.

"When looked at from the West's point of view, the East, especially the Islamic world, is seen as a huge harem. Of course, there are some distinct reasons why the West nurtured such an image regarding Muslim women. For while Europe was establishing its own identity, it placed the East, the Islamic world in particular, in a counter position as its opposite. It needed an image of the East that was loaded with all negative characteristics. This was built on the stereotype of the imprisoned, oppressed woman."

(Nazife Şişman, 2010)
http://www.worldbulletin.net/author_article_detail.php?id=2118

orientalism & the exoticizing of Muslim women

Grand Odalisque (1814), by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres

The Turkish Bath (1862), by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres

http://www.orientalist-art.org.uk/ingres.html

http://www.artchive.com/artchive/I/ingres/turkbath.jpg.html

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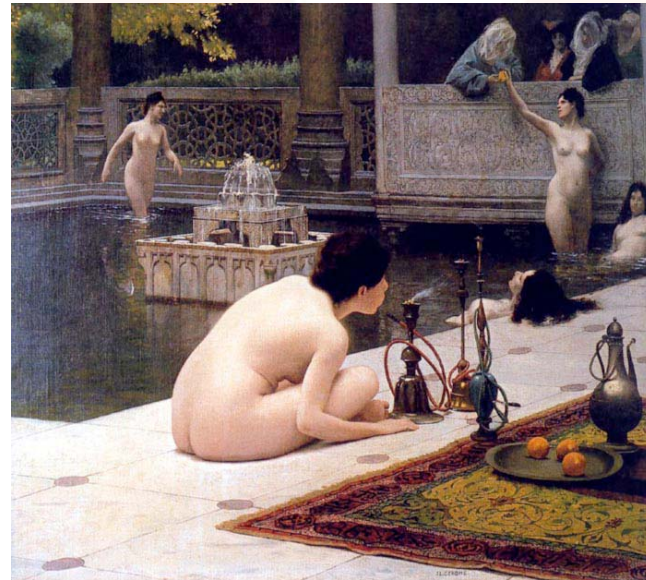# orientalism & the exoticizing of Muslim women

Algerian Women in Their Chamber (1834), by Eugene Delacroix

The Hookah Lighter (1898), by Jean-Leon Gerome

http://www.orientalist-art.org.uk/delacroix.html

http://www.orientalist-art.org.uk/gerome.html

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orientalism & the exoticizing of Muslim women

The Almeh with Pipe (1873),
by Jean-Leon Gerome

Young Arab Woman with Waterpipe (1873),
by Jean-Leon Gerome

http://www.orientalist-art.org.uk/gerome.html

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orientalism & the exoticizing of Muslim women

- The representation and image of Muslim women today is part of an ongoing historical representation of Muslim women in the West that emerged with colonialism.

- Western popular media and art have a history of presenting the veiled Muslim woman as being exotic.

- Painting Muslim women as sexual objects, usually thinly or scarcely clothed, lying in a seductive manner, *unveils* these women. That is, their bodies, which they covered to be modest, are revealed against their will for the world to see. There has been a strange fascination with unveiling Muslim women to exhibit their bodies.

orientalism & the exoticizing of Muslim women

- With the advent of photography, European travellers documented the daily life and traditions of local people in Muslim countries. Postcards were the public emblem of colonial travel, and the preferred form of correspondence for overseas residents of all classes. Postcards could be more easily produced and more widely circulated than paintings, and they were more affordable. (E. Hight & G. Sampson, 2002).

- Turn-of the-century Algerian postcards of partially undressed girls and women in harem-like settings reflect the empowered male colonialist view of the eroticized, feminized other in the Middle-East. (R. Deroo, 2002).

orientalism & the exoticizing of Muslim women

- Today there is still a preoccupation in Western popular culture with depicting Muslim women as sexual objects. Eroticized representations of Muslim women feed into the imagined stereotype of Muslim women as sexual objects.


http://miss-mischief-6.livejournal.com/

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orientalism & the exoticizing of Muslim women (cont'd)

- The current orientalist image on the right continues the exoticizing of Muslim women. The woman in the image fulfils the requirements of the western stereotype of the mysterious woman hiding behind her veil, while her heavily made-up eyes and alluring gaze clearly make her a sexual object for male consumption.

- How would this construction of Muslim women as exotic sexual objects shape the treatment of young Muslim women?

http://reviews. presidentschoice.ca/6584/ F16262/reviews.htm
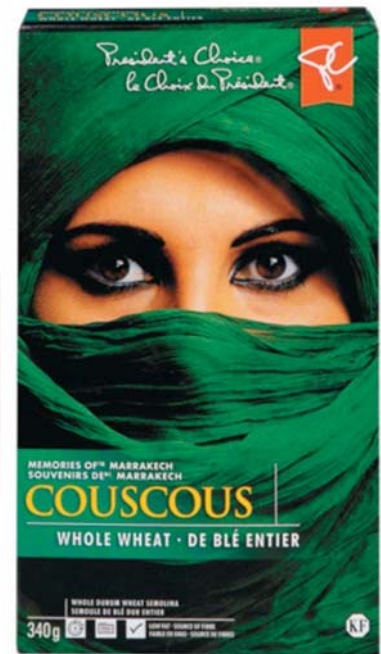
role of educators & school administrators

- What is the role of educators and school administrators when it comes to addressing violence in schools?

- What actions should have been taken by educators and school administrators in the C.W. Jefferys case?

barriers faced by educators & school administrators

- Often educators and school administrators do not know enough about different cultures to understand and deal effectively with issues.

- There may be institutional resistance to acknowledging and dealing with problems.

- There may be little or no government funding and resources to help bridge home and schools.

- Community groups are often underfunded and lack the resources to fully support schools.

recommendations

- Increase awareness of the diversity and range of issues that Muslim communities are facing.

- Increase schools' community outreach. Include communities as partners.

- Create a more inclusive school culture.

- Work to dismantle systems of oppression that are embedded in the structure and culture of schools and in educational practices and policies.