



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

Module 6a: The Case of Aqsa Parvez
(powerpoint)

Module 6b: The Sexual Assault Case at
C.W. Jefferys Collegiate *(powerpoint)*

Module 6c: Educator's Guide for
Module 6b

violence against women and children: media literacy case studies—the sexual assault case at c.w. jefferys collegiate *educator's guide*

INTRODUCTION

This module provides supplementary information for educators for the presentation in Module 6b.

slide 2: background to the case

It is especially important to note that the sexual assault of the Muslim girl was discovered only after the public inquiry was launched in response to the shooting of Jordan Manners. This raises serious concerns and questions such as:

- Why was this only an issue after it had been uncovered by investigators?
- Why were the parents not notified by school administration?
- What assumptions about the student and her family were made by school administrators?
- What is the role of schools, educators and school administrators when it comes to addressing sexual assault in schools?
- What role did social differences such as religion, ethnicity, gender and class play in the way in which this issue was handled by the school?
- What was the relationship between the school and the family of the young girl?

slides 3–4: violence in schools

The **University of Texas massacre** – On August 1, 1966, Charles Joseph Whitman, a student at the University of Texas at Austin, shot and killed 16 people and wounded 32 others on and around the university campus.

The **Columbine High School massacre** – On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold shot and killed 12 students and one teacher and injured 21 other students at Columbine High School in Columbine (Jefferson County), Colorado, U.S. The pair committed suicide. It is the fourth-deadliest school massacre in United States history.

The **École Polytechnique Massacre** (also known as the **Montreal Massacre**) – On December 6, 1989, Marc Lepine shot and killed 14 women and injured 10 other women and 4 men at the École Polytechnique in Montreal before shooting himself. In his suicide note he claimed political motives and blamed feminists for ruining his life. Violence is often only brought to the attention of the public when there are extreme cases of physical violence. However, as noted in slide 6, violence can operate in more systemic and pervasive ways.

The **Virginia Tech massacre** – On April 16, 2007, Seung Hui Cho killed 32 people and wounded many others on the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute, before committing suicide. There has been speculation that Cho's experience of racism growing up in America and his negative views on women were both factors that contributed to his actions. In 2005, Cho was accused of stalking two female students.

slides 5–9: safe schools

Slides 5 to 9 explore how safety in schools is constructed. Schools do not exist apart from the wider society in which they are situated. The poverty, sexism, racism, homophobia, Islamophobia and other forms of oppression that are present in the surrounding community and wider society are reflected in the school environment. Racial, sexual, religious and other forms of harassment (physical and psychological) against students and teachers have contributed to making schools unsafe spaces. The lack of community and school funding and resources, and the inability of educators and school administrators to deal with racism, sexism and other forms of oppression that are part of the school culture, have also contributed to making schools unsafe spaces.

The Zero Tolerance Policy under the Safe School Act (2000) was aimed at ensuring safety in schools. However, rather than dealing with the root causes of violence, the policy functions to discriminate against students from racialized communities and students with disabilities.

The lack of political will to provide appropriate resources to marginalized communities contributes to the violence in schools. Institutional resistance is also a contributing factor. *Institutional resistance* is a general unwillingness to acknowledge and report conflict, harassment, or violence (Henry & Tator, 2010, p. 209). In regard to racial harassment in schools, T. McCaskell, as discussed in Henry & Tator (2010), “reported that teachers were reluctant to report racist incidents because they didn’t want to be seen as lacking control over their classes; department heads did not report them because it ‘looked bad’; principals were reluctant to report them because they reflected negatively on their school; and superintendents did not report them because superintendents were supposed to provide leadership” (p. 209). McCaskell also found that racial incidents and hate activity, while known at an informal level, do not become institutional knowledge, even though it is required by boards to report such incidents (Henry & Tator, 2010, p. 209).

It is important to recognize that there are unequal power relations between educational institutions, parents and the community. These unequal relations of power are a manifestation of systemic inequality. And this systemic inequality is shaped by many social differences, such as race, class, religion, gender, ethnicity, and language.

Minority parents are disproportionately left out from school involvement due to various factors, such as:

- some minority parents’ perception that school requires no outside input and interference
- lack of social and cultural capital (e.g., language, economic, cultural)
- exclusionary and inhospitable school culture
- the model of the “good” parent; where whiteness (and other dominant forms of social difference such as English-speaking, middle-class, Christian, etc.) acts as a filter, filtering out the perceptions, concerns and experiences of minority parents

slides 10–12: mainstream media coverage of the case

- Slide 10 provides a list of links to mainstream media print coverage of the case. Slide 11 highlights a few telling comments from some of these articles.

- Based on the media coverage, educators should reflect on what assumptions were being made about Muslim girls, Muslim families, Muslim Canadian identity, and the role of the school and school administrators.
- Slide 12 presents pointed questions to help educators think critically about how the media covered or did not cover the case. These questions are discussed below.

Question 1: 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?

This question raises larger questions about who has the power to narrate their own life and whose lives are narrated for them. Educators should reflect on the following:

- Muslim female students' voices are absent.
- Muslim parents' voices are absent.

Question 2: What assumptions are being made about the different parties involved?

- Muslim students and their families are not entitled to the same respect from the school as non-Muslim students and parents are entitled to.
- Muslim families are viewed as ignorant or indifferent to the needs of their children.
- Muslim families would put their religious and cultural beliefs above the wellbeing and needs of their children.
- The religious and cultural beliefs of Muslim families are oppositional to those of the dominant society.
- Muslim families would blame and punish their daughters for being sexually assaulted.
- Muslim families are not concerned or do not care about the violence and oppression their children are subjected to in school.
- Muslim families have cultural taboos that would prevent them from understanding issues around sexual violence.
- Muslim families constitute a repressive unsafe space for Muslim girls. Embedded in the construction of the strict Muslim family is the assumption of patriarchal male violence that threatens the physical and psychological safety of Muslim girls/women.
- Shame and fear related to sexual violence is a problem only for Muslim girls.

- Muslim girls lack agency and do not resist sexism and other forms of oppression. It should be noted that the Muslim student who was assaulted did tell her friends about the incident.
- It is their religion that makes Muslim girls shy and unpopular, rather than a culture of sexism, Islamophobia, racism and other forms of oppression that they are subjected to in school.
- School is a safer place for Muslim girls than their homes, irrespective of the violence that takes place within the school

slides 13–15: representations of Muslim women in the mainstream media/saving Muslim women?

Educators should examine where their information and assumptions about Muslim men and women (both young and old) and Muslim families come from. Mainstream media play a central part in the dominant representations of Muslims. Some of these dominant representations include:

- patriarchal, emotionally and physically violent Muslim man
- overbearing, strict, irrational, emotionally detached Muslim father
- fundamentalist Muslim male
- dutiful Muslim woman (wife, daughter)
- oppressed Muslim women who need to be rescued from their violent, patriarchal religion and culture

Consider how these representations contributed to the decision of C.W. Jefferys' school administrators to not inform the parents of the alleged sexual assault of their daughter.

slides 16–24: the “oppressed Muslim women” identity and orientalism & the exoticizing of Muslim women

The treatment of Muslim women today must be linked to colonialism and the orientalist constructions and representations of Muslim women that projected them as exotic sexual objects for Western consumption. These images still circulate today, particularly through dominant media. Thus, while women in general are disproportionately vulnerable to sexual violence, Muslim women are more so due to their racialized and gendered status in society. It is important to understand the ways in which race, gender and religion intersect with one another to construct Muslim women as exotic sexual objects for heterosexual male fantasy.

slides 25–27: role of educators & school administrators, barriers faced by educators & school administrators and recommendations

Slide 25 provides discussion questions about the roles of educators and school administrators. Slide 26 suggests some barriers they face.

Slide 27 presents some recommendations for action.

References in Modules 6b and 6c

Deroo, R. (2002). Colonial Collecting: French Women & Algerian *Cartes Postales*. *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place*. New York: Routledge. [Cited in Module 6b, slide 23.]

Henry, F., & Tator, C. (2010). *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society* (4th ed.). Toronto: Neilson Thomson. [Cited in this module, regarding slides 7–11.]

Hight, E., & Sampson, G. (2002). Introduction: Photography, “Race,” and Post-Colonial Theory. *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place*. New York: Routledge. [Cited in Module 6b, slide 23.]

Lawson, E. (2003). Re-assessing Safety and Discipline in Our Schools: Opportunities for Growth, Opportunities for Change. *Orbit*, 33(3). [Cited in Module 6b, slide 9.]

additional resources

The Peaceful Families Project

(<http://peacefulfamilies.org>)

Founded by community and civil rights Sharifa Alkhateeb in 2000, the Peaceful Families Project (PFP) is aimed at addressing domestic violence issues. PFP conducts peaceful family dynamics and violence awareness programs across the United States for Muslim communities. They also provide cultural sensitivity workshops for service providers and professionals serving Muslim clientele. Educational resources provided by Peaceful Families include the book *Change from Within: Diverse Perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities*, at: <http://peacefulfamilies.org/CFWIntro.pdf> and the documentary "Garments for One Another: Ending Domestic Violence in Muslim Families" (<http://www.peacefulfamilies.org.dvd.html>)

Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration

(<http://mrcssi.com/>)

Building Community Support Network for Muslim Women & Children Victimized by Domestic Violence

The primary purpose of this project is to build social support network for Muslim women and children victimized by domestic violence by building capacity for leadership within the community. The proposed project aims to lessen the impact of crime and trauma through support services to victims to increase the victim's level of empowerment, to increase victim/community safety and help prevent re-victimization and to identify and reduce barriers to improve accessibility to services. This project is conducted in partnership with the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children at UWO, and funded by Ontario Victim Services Secretariat: Ministry of Attorney General.

White Ribbon Campaign

(www.whiteribbon.ca/)

The White Ribbon Campaign (WRC) is the largest global initiative of men working towards ending the violence against women (VAW). This initiative began in Canada in 1991, when a group of men decided to speak out about the violence against women. Today, there are white ribbon campaigns in over fifty-five countries. WRC in Canada runs its campaign from November 25 (the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women) until December 6, Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, which coincides with the massacre of 14 women at L'école Polytechnic in Montreal on December 6, 1989. The focus of the white ribbon campaign is largely on educating men and boys on violence against women. The wearing of a white ribbon represents a personal pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls.