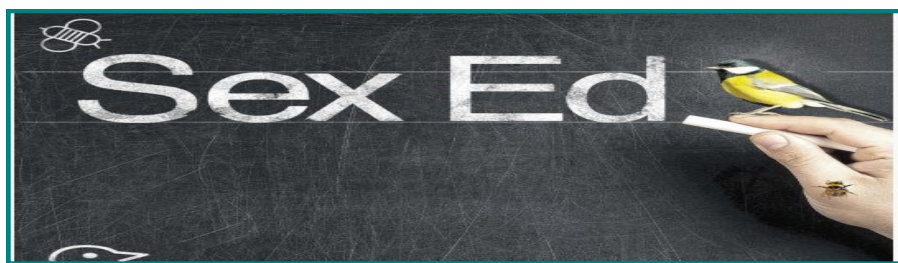




The Monthly Rag

Light to You by the Feminist & Gender Studies Student Advisory Council and Edited by Kadesha Caradine (FGS '16)



The Perils of Sexual Education: Breeding Sexual Inequality, Hegemonic Masculinity, and Heteronormativity

By Ivy Wappler ('18)

Sex Ed perpetuates an image of the “normal” sexual woman that embodies a virginal, ignorant quality about their own sexual potential. Women are often the vehicles for male pleasure, and less comfortable with seeking their own sexual satisfaction. This can be connected to a lack of education about the female sexual organs, namely the clitoris. The clitoris (or the clit) is largely ignored in women’s formal and informal sexual education, as many women do not know it exists or what it does for much of their lives. Without adequate understanding or control of their own bodies, young women are often unsatisfied and succumb to male pleasure when having sex. Women often discover the clit by themselves by accident, discovering how it feels, but have no knowledge of its name or true function. Waskul, Vannini, & Weisen (2007) call this “symbolic purgatory,” and it is characterized by intense shame. The purgatory exists between women feeling shameful about their ignorance, and also embarrassed to openly seek more information about themselves for fear that their curiosity is not societally acceptable.

Unfortunately, people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual are provided with substantially less support and information from their sexual education providers. Along these lines, Haggis and Mulholland (2014) investigate how sexual education systems approach “difference” in their curricula. They point out that current approaches to difference reinforce a normative identity that is harmful and unrepresentative of young people. Because of this, “sex” is almost always defined as penetrative, penis-in-vagina intercourse. Many LGBTQIA+ people are then left with no information about their lived experiences, which can hinder their access to healthy sex. Buck and Parrotta (2014) emphasize that participation in Sex Ed that is LGBTQIA+ inclusive helps to quell homophobia even in students with conflicting religious beliefs. Young people in the 21st century formulate their identities from many parts of their surroundings. Sexual educators have a responsibility to approach their lesson plans with an attitude of inclusivity, rather than adding on the “other” identities as an afterthought (Haggis and Mulholland, 2014). Sex and Relationship Education (or SRE) and Sex Ed curricula need to acknowledge the social, political, and cultural forces that shape students understanding of sex and sexualities (Oerton and Bowen, 2014).

It is clear that many problems regarding women’s empowerment, masculinity, and the LGBTQIA+ community can be traced back to ideals projected in sex education. Providing all young people with a valuable space to come to terms with their emerging sexualities and diverse identities has the potential to grow tolerance in the upcoming generations. Reformed sexual education can enable a shift from our current strict, unforgiving and discordant social identities to more a harmonious and fluid society.

Obsession and Contempt: Bodies that are Black, Female, and Athletic

By Kaimara Herron-July (FGS Minor '16 and Student Advisory Council '15)



When Serena Williams began competition for yet another set of Grand Slam titles in the summer of 2015, much attention was paid to the astounding success Williams has achieved in her 20-year professional career. Having recovered from injuries, health issues, and upsetting defeats on the court, she has won 21 Grand Slam titles, and has earned major endorsement deals with Puma, Pepsi, and Nike, among many other companies. But along with the accolades and deep appreciation shown for her athletic abilities, there was an accompanying tirade of commentary made about her that was a cross between anti-Black racism, sexism, and transphobia. Although Moya Bailey, a Black queer feminist, coined the term misogynoir in “They Aren’t Talking About Me...” to describe the particular intersection of anti-Black misogyny found in hip-hop, it applies whenever black women are present in popular culture and portrayed as less-human, less-feminine, and less than deserving of praise for their success.

Comments calling Serena Williams animalistic or beastly in comparison to the descriptions of her white female opponents are made and accepted as legitimate sports-talk, as if it were a just another critique of her serving skills or the efficacy of her backhand. These comments from otherwise legitimate sports journalists and writers reveal society’s perverse desire to both consume and destroy the Black female body. In the article “Pornographic Eroticism and Sexual Grotesquerie in Representations of African American Sportswomen,” James McKay and Helen Johnson conclude the following about the simultaneous detestation and fascination with the bodies of black women athletes, particularly Serena and Venus Williams:

The exceptional athletic feats of the Williams sisters have occurred amidst a welter of denigration discourses that have moved from the narratives of ‘pornographic eroticism’ to powerful and denigrating criticisms of their putatively ‘sexual grotesque’ behavior, and their threatening corporealities have been recuperated by a racialized and sexualized semiotic regime. It is the ongoing systematic pathologizing of African American women’s bodies as ‘sexually grotesque’ that, in tandem with ‘pornographic eroticism’, synecdochically constructs them as racialized and sexual spectacles.

Editor’s Note: To read the rest of this article, visit www.femgeniuses.com or click the QRC code below.



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