

studio180

Study Guide

Fall 2014

NSFW

by Lucy Kirkwood

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A. Tips for Using this Guide

Thank you for choosing to bring your students to Studio 180 Theatre's **North American premiere** production of *NSFW* by **Lucy Kirkwood**. Not only is this the first time this play has been produced here, our production marks the North American premiere of any work by this award-winning playwright. We are excited for you and your students to join us at the theatre and we have created this Study Guide to support and enhance both the production and your efforts to incorporate the play into your ongoing class curriculum.

The themes, issues, questions and opportunities for exploration this play provokes are vast and we have done our best to supply a comprehensive, varied, accessible, challenging and engaging array of resources. *NSFW*, like all Studio 180 shows, tackles some Big Questions – including every perspective, opinion and angle is impossible. We do hope, however, that this Study Guide provides you and your students with some useful background information, effective resources and productive suggestions for classroom discussion and further study.

Our Study Guide is a comprehensive document, so here are some tips on how to use it:

- We recommend all teachers take some time to review **Section B – Guidelines for Safe & Productive Classroom Discussion**.
- **Prior to attending the show,**
 - We recommend you **check out Sections C & D** for a brief background on the company and the play as well as an important section on theatre etiquette. We've also included a great interview with the playwright in **Section E1**.
 - One of the best resources we've found is **Jean Kilbourne's** seminal work on representations of women in advertising and the media. Consider a pre-show screening of *Killing Us Softly 4*. Details about this film can be found in **Section G2**.
 - The better students are prepared for what they are about to see, the more they will get out of the experience at the theatre. Depending on your students' experience with the concepts of **consent, privacy and body image**, you may want to consult **Section E** for some background information and resources on these topics. Because the play was written and is set in the UK, your students may find our **Glossary (Section F)** useful.
- The **follow-up** possibilities and potential for dialogue and exploration inspired by this play are limitless. In **Section G** we suggest themes and questions we hope **will provoke lively discussion in your classroom**.
- **For a more in-depth follow-up experience**, we recommend you **check out Section H**, which offers articles representing a broad spectrum of approaches, styles and points of view around some of the themes and questions inspired by the play. Pick an article that will speak to your students' specific interests and needs and use it as a springboard to class discussion.
- As much as we want to, we can never cover it all. The themes and questions we hope *NSFW* will inspire are limitless and impact all of us on a daily basis. Many writers, artists and activists are exploring these themes and engaging in the dialogue. Please **see Section I – Recommended Resources** for some places to go **for additional support and materials**.

B. Guidelines for Safe & Productive Classroom Discussion

Studio 180 is known for provocative shows that tackle potentially sensitive, personal and controversial topics. In the case of *NSFW*, many such issues are explored, including sexuality, gender, exploitation and marginalization, and the play includes some very strong language.

We have developed the following guidelines to help you lead productive pre- and post-show sessions in which all students feel safe, respected and able to contribute openly and honestly to discussion:

- Class members should make a commitment to respecting one another. Invite suggestions from students as to what “**respect**” means to them. Some of these ground rules may include a commitment to confidentiality, or the agreement that only one participant speaks at a time or that ideas are never to be ridiculed or put down.
- Your class may include students from a wide variety of cultural, racial, religious and national backgrounds. Students may come from different socioeconomic backgrounds and some may identify as LGBTQ. Others may be questioning or even struggling with their sexual or gender identity. Students will enter into the conversation as they feel comfortable. **Teachers and students must resist the urge to place individuals in the spotlight based on their perceived identity or point of view.**
- It is the moderator’s role to establish as safe a setting as possible, and they must take special care to ensure that **students holding a majority opinion do not vilify those “on the other side” who hold a minority view.** The moderator should also pose questions to the class to help keep the conversation on track.
- The point of a classroom discussion about the issues addressed in *NSFW* should not be to reach a class consensus. The goal should be to **establish a forum for a free and respectful exchange of ideas.**
- **Please keep in mind that the better students are prepared prior to attending the play, the more they will get out of the experience.** An awareness of what they are about to see will provide students with greater access to the ideas presented onstage. For this reason, this Study Guide is filled with background information and suggestions for classroom discussions and activities. In addition, **we offer pre-show chats before every Wednesday matinee, beginning at 1PM.** Please let us know if you plan to take advantage of this opportunity at the time of booking.
- Your students’ experiences of the play will also be heightened by effective follow-up class discussion. **We offer post-show Q&A sessions after every Wednesday matinée and Thursday evening performance** to assist in the follow-up process, but it is important to note that students will continue to process their experiences long after they leave the theatre. If time permits, a follow-up discussion a few days later will likely be helpful and productive.

If you are interested in finding out about **Studio 180 IN CLASS** – our program of production- and topic-based **workshops** – please contact **Jessica** at **416-962-1800** or jessica@studio180theatre.com, or visit studio180theatre.com/in-class.

C. Introduction to the Company & the Play

1. Studio 180 Theatre

Inspired by the belief that people can engage more fully in the world through the experience of live performance, Studio 180 produces socially relevant theatre that provokes public discourse and promotes community engagement. Our inaugural production of *The Laramie Project* played to sold-out houses at Artword Theatre in 2003. Its success led to a 2004 remount at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, earning two Dora Award nominations.

Since then, Studio 180 has continued to offer acclaimed productions of plays that tackle difficult issues and generate powerful audience and community responses. These are often Toronto, Canadian and/or North American premieres of large ensemble pieces that are contemporary, internationally renowned, and unlikely to be produced elsewhere –

- 2006: Canadian premiere of *The Arab-Israeli Cookbook* at the Berkeley Street Theatre.
- March 2008: Canadian premiere of *Stuff Happens* at the Berkeley Street Theatre Downstairs was a sold-out smash hit.
- October 2008: World premiere of *Offensive Shadows*, by Toronto playwright Paul Dunn, at the Tarragon Theatre Extra Space. That year *NOW Magazine* named Studio 180 “Toronto’s Best Independent Theatre Company of 2008.” Paul is currently our Playwright in Residence.
- November 2009: Mirvish Productions remount of *Stuff Happens* at Royal Alexandra Theatre.
- For our 2008/09 through 2011/12 seasons, Studio 180 participated in the Berkeley Street Project Initiative, producing one show annually as part of the Canadian Stage subscription season. Productions included *Blackbird*, *The Overwhelming*, *Our Class* and *Clybourne Park*, (with *Our Class* and *Clybourne Park* each earning Dora nominations).
- December 2010/January 2011: *Parade*, co-produced with Acting Up Stage Company, earned two Dora nominations, including Outstanding Production of a Musical.
- October 2011: Larry Kramer’s landmark drama *The Normal Heart* in association with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre (one Dora nomination); due to its overwhelming success, we remounted this production in October/November 2012.
- In 2012/13 and 2013/14: we were proud to be a part of Mirvish Productions’ Off-Mirvish second stage series at the Panasonic Theatre with the remount of our acclaimed production of *Clybourne Park* in 2012/13 and *God of Carnage* in 2013/14.
- February 2013: in celebration of our company’s 10-year anniversary, we staged a reading of *The Laramie Project* at the Panasonic Theatre, featuring over 50 Studio 180 alumni artists.
- April 2014: we launched a five-year partnership with The Theatre Centre, staging our critically acclaimed Canadian premiere of *Cock* (Toronto Theatre Critics’ Award) at the newly restored heritage site.

NSFW is the cornerstone of our 2014/15 Season and marks our second show at The Theatre Centre. We are currently developing new plays with Hannah Moscovitch and Paul Dunn as well as adapting a David Rakoff novel for presentation at Toronto’s 2015 Pan Am Games.

2. *NSFW* by Lucy Kirkwood

In the cutthroat world of magazine journalism, where jobs are scarce and beauty standards are punishing, what is the value of personal integrity? For the folks at *Doghouse* and *Electra* magazines, relationships, legal liability and self-worth are all at stake. Everyone strives for professional success and financial stability – but at what cost? Who will hold tight to their values and who will sell out to the highest bidder?

NSFW first opened in 2012 at London's Royal Court Theatre. Studio 180 is proud to be bringing Lucy Kirkwood's sharp new satire to Toronto for its North American premiere.

Critical Acclaim for the Royal Court production of *NSFW*:

"Kirkwood hits several nails squarely on the head... the hypocrisy of the male mags that pretend they're providing a public service, the snarkiness of tone that pervades even upmarket journalism and, above all, the economic desperation that drives intelligent people to sacrifice their principles." *THE GUARDIAN*

"A savvy and deeply uncomfortable look at the world of modern media. It's a timely, provocative response to the way women are presented in magazines – studded with moments of outrageous humour." ★★★★★ *EVENING STANDARD*

"A black satire about power and privacy in the cut-throat era of Photoshop, internet exhibitionism and high graduate unemployment." ★★★★★ *INDEPENDENT*

Check out what playwright Lucy Kirkwood has to say about *NSFW*! Find an interview with Kirkwood, published in *The Observer* immediately prior to the play's UK premiere, in **Section E1** of this Study Guide.

WARNINGS:

1. **Coarse language:** Includes multiple occurrences of the word "fuck," in various forms, as well as words such as "cock" and "bitch."
2. **Sexually suggestive images:** During the play, you will see magazine pin-up photos of young women akin to what you would find on the covers of *Maxim* or *Entertainment Weekly*.
3. **Brief partial nudity:** In addition to the photos described above, at one point during the play a male character rubs his bare bottom on a desk.

If you have questions or concerns about the content of the play, or would like to request an electronic reading copy, please do not hesitate to contact us at education@studio180theatre.com or 416-962-1800.

3. **Lucy Kirkwood – Playwright**

Studio 180 Theatre could not be more proud to be introducing North America to Lucy Kirkwood – one of the UK's hottest young writers. Only 30 years old, this prolific rising star is garnering international attention, and already the recipient of a prestigious Olivier Award. Judging by her recent successes and a number of projects in the works, North American audiences will no doubt soon be hearing a great deal more from Lucy. It is an honour to be producing her work for the first time ever on a North American stage, here at The Theatre Centre in Toronto.

In 2007, Lucy graduated with a degree in English Literature from the University of Edinburgh, and whilst there she wrote her first full-length stage play, *Grady Hot Potato*. Lucy's next play, *Guns or Butter*, was produced at the Terror 2007 Festival at the Union Theatre, London, and was subsequently broadcast by BBC Radio. In 2008, Lucy's play *Tinderbox* was produced by the Bush Theatre, and in the same year *Hedda*, her adaptation of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, was produced by the Gate Theatre, London, to wide critical acclaim.

Lucy's play *Psychogeography* was produced as part of the Terror 2009 Festival. In the same year, Lucy's play *it felt empty when the heart went at first but it is alright now* was produced by Clean Break Theatre Co. at the Arcola Theatre. The play, which received stunning reviews, was nominated for an Evening Standard Award – Best Newcomer, and made Lucy joint winner of the John Whiting Award in 2010.

Lucy's stage adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, co-devised and directed by Katie Mitchell, was performed at the National Theatre as its Christmas show in 2011. In the same year, her play *The Small Hours* (co-written with Ed Hime) opened at the Hampstead earlier, and her play *Housekeeping* was performed as part of Theatre Uncut season at Southwark Playhouse.

NSFW premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 2012. Her recent success, *Chimerica*, premiered at the Almeida Theatre in 2013 and subsequently transferred to the West End, earning Lucy the prestigious Olivier and Evening Standard Best New Play awards, this year.

Earlier this year, Lucy collaborated with Lost Dog on a Brighton Festival co-commissioned dance project, *Like Rabbits*, adapted from Virginia Woolf's short story *Lappin and Lapinova*. Lucy also writes for television, and has written for *Skins* (Company Pictures) and more recently created and wrote the new series *The Smoke* (Kudos/Sky 1). She is currently under commission to the Royal Court Theatre, the National Theatre and Manhattan Theatre Club in New York. She is also developing a new screenplay for Film4/Ruby Films.

D. Attending the Performance

Prior to the performance, please ensure that your students are well prepared. The better prepared they are, the more they will get out of the experience. The following guidelines should help you and your students get the most out of attending *NSFW*:

- **Please arrive early.** When travelling in the city, whether by school bus or TTC, it is always best to leave extra time in case of traffic or transit delays. **All Wednesday matinée performances will begin promptly at 1:30PM.** To avoid disruption, **LATECOMERS may not be admitted.**
- **An added incentive to arrive early!** Audience members attending *NSFW* will have the unique opportunity to experience our fantastic **lobby exhibit** featuring visual art thematically linked to the play and curated by [Feminist Art Conference \(factoronto.org\)](http://factoronto.org). **You might even want to have a class discussion comparing the impact of different artistic approaches to similar themes** (visual art and live theatre).
- **All photography and recording of the performance is strictly prohibited.**
- Please impress upon your students the importance of **turning off all cell phones**, music players and other electronic devices. If students understand *why* it is important to refrain from using electronics, they will be more likely to adhere to this etiquette. **Remind students that they will be seeing people performing live in an intimate space** and, as a rule, if you can see and hear the actors, the actors can see and hear you. Even text messaging – with its distracting, glowing light – is extremely disruptive in the theatre. **Please be courteous.**
- **Outside food and beverages are not permitted in the auditorium.** Spills are messy and noisy snacks and bottles can be disruptive for performers and patrons alike. Please ensure that students have the opportunity to eat lunch prior to attending the performance. The West Queen West neighbourhood offers a wide range of wonderful dining options to suit all tastes and budgets. If your schedule permits, you might want to include some time prior to or following the performance to check out one of Toronto's most up-and-coming neighbourhoods.
- **CONTENT WARNING: *NSFW* contains some coarse language mature and sexual themes.** For a more complete content warning, please see the description on p. 4 of this Study Guide. If you have concerns about content or language prior to attending the performance and wish to receive further details, please do not hesitate to contact our education department at education@studio180theatre.com or **416-962-1800**. We will be pleased to provide you with an electronic reading copy of the script.
- **We encourage student responses and feedback.** Please take the time to discuss appropriate audience responses with your students. After each Wednesday matinée and Thursday evening performance, we offer a talkback (Q&A) session because we are interested in hearing what our audiences have to say and engaging in a dialogue inspired by the play. If students are aware of the post-show talkback they will be better prepared to formulate questions during the performance. And they will better remember to remain in their seats following the curtain call! Kindly take some time to complete our online [Teacher/Student Response Form \(studio180theatre.com/education-feedback\)](http://studio180theatre.com/education-feedback) and ask your students to do the same. Your feedback is valuable to us.

E. Background Information

1. *Interview with the Playwright – Lucy Kirkwood:*

“Boys are force-fed this very plastic sexuality on a mass scale”

By TIM ADAMS

Published October 21, 2012

[*The Observer*](#)

***NSFW*, Lucy Kirkwood’s new play, focuses on the relationship between the media and sexuality. She talks about the exposure of teenage boys to pornography, and about dealing with criticism.**

In researching her new play, a comedy partly set in the offices of a *Nuts!*-style men’s magazine called “Doghouse,” Lucy Kirkwood felt herself channelling the spirit of Mary Whitehouse only once. *NSFW* takes its title from the directive on certain web pages – “not safe for work” – which acts as a warning about content you wouldn’t necessarily want your boss to see you browsing. Among those NSFW-rated pages that Kirkwood discovered was a site called Rate my Rack.

“Of all the fairly grim things I looked at, that was the one that probably disturbed me most,” she says, in a lunchtime break from watching rehearsals at the Royal Court in London where *NSFW* opens this week. “Rate my Rack is this place where hundreds of girls and women send their picture in – no head, just their boobs – inviting people to log on and rate the picture out of 10 and add some comments. It was not really the men looking and rating that is sad so much as all these women thinking, ‘I need this affirmation.’ Cutting their own heads off, as it were. I mean, you have to live in the culture you are in. But I found that quite depressing.”

NSFW dwells candidly on some of the implications of that culture, finding unsettling and often sharply funny satire in the ways in which magazines – and their readers – routinely objectify sexuality and the female body. Kirkwood does not restrict her attention to the laddish *Loaded* leer. The second half of *NSFW* takes place in a glossy women’s magazine called “Electra” and has merciless fun with a female editor in her late 40s who forces a prospective editorial assistant, a sensitive young man who needs the job, cruelly to find flaws in the perfect celebrity bodies that will grace her pages.

“In different ways, both men and women betray women,” Kirkwood says. In examining these issues, and without wanting to “dramatise a *Guardian* editorial,” she nevertheless deftly locates the pressure points of our current discomfort over privacy and sexuality, innocence and prurience, and the ways in which those boundaries are made porous by media in obsessive search of market share.

After a run of very different stories that have produced collective unease and shock – from voyeurism and the Duchess of Cambridge, through the appalling details of grooming and rape in Rochdale to the ongoing Jimmy Savile revelations – the play feels very much of its moment. Kirkwood suggests this is inevitability rather than serendipity.

“People keep saying to me, ‘Isn’t it good timing?’” she says. “But we are always talking about these things, aren’t we? The play wouldn’t have been written if we didn’t live in a culture where those anxieties didn’t have a natural end point. The word ‘climate’ comes up in the play a lot and the question of how that vague idea creates the boundaries for these kinds of issues and how we discuss them.”

I have only read *NSFW*, but Kirkwood's writing is pitch-perfect on the page. She spent some time in the kinds of places that these issues find their home, talking to magazine editors, visiting the offices of *Tatler*, among other places (though she is anxious to stress that was not the model for *Electra*), and she has a precise ear for editorial banter of compromise and self-deception. She tells me her writing heroes are Arthur Miller and Edward Albee and this play begins to demonstrate a hint of that kind of mimetic care.

It is also, in that tradition, much concerned with work, what we will do to pay the bills. Kirkwood is astute about the current desperation to find a foothold in "the creative industries" and the exploitation that results.

"I find that fascinating, the disconnect between the people who create these magazines and the people who read them," she says. "I mean, all these overqualified English graduates with their literary references writing captions for models. You can't blame them, because most of them seem to have worked for nothing for three years. My sister works in that kind of world and she is brilliant and has a CV 20 pages long and 18 pages of that are unpaid internships."

Kirkwood's own CV has been a varied one, so far, taking in an acclaimed updating of *Hedda Gabler*, set in Notting Hill; the dystopian extremes of *Tinderbox*, which, at the height of the financial crash, pictured a Britain of the near future unhinged by riots and cannibalism, and managed to find some bleak comedy in the fallout; and the affecting first-person of *It Felt Empty When the Heart Went at First But it is Alright Now*, based on the stories of victims of sex-trafficking locked up in detention centres such as Yarl's Wood. It is not a straightforward trajectory, though if you were looking for a consistent theme she suggests that: "A lot of my work dwells on this idea of people buying and selling things that maybe shouldn't be bought or sold. Things that are private, personal." And of course, to some extent, we are all guilty.

The relatively trivial example of the Duchess of Cambridge's topless sunbathing is nevertheless relevant in this context, she believes: "It's the attitude of, 'That's disgusting... let me see them' that runs through a lot of this," she suggests. "And it was, you know, middle-aged women who wanted to look as much as young men."

Kirkwood hesitates before describing herself as a political writer, though you might group her with her contemporaries Lucy Prebble and Polly Stenham in taking on subjects that demand ethical judgments, albeit complex ones.

"I think people are very afraid of appearing coy or moralising," she says. "No one wants to look prudish and so there almost seems to be an embargo on even discussing any of these issues. There is a new campaign to ban Page 3. I mean, that last one was [led by] Clare Short and we all remember how that turned out."

In 2010, Kirkwood wrote a short play for the Tricycle theatre about the Greenham Common women and researching that generation's protests seemed an invitation to think hard about what feminism might mean now. In discussing this play, she references Natasha Walter's book *Living Dolls*, saying she "particularly liked Walter's equivocation on things. As a modern feminist, you almost have to keep stating that there is nothing wrong with enjoying clothes or make-up until it becomes a fascism, all of that."

Kirkwood, who has recently moved from a shared house in Shoreditch, east London, to live with her partner near Diss on the border of Suffolk and Norfolk, seems something of an equivocation of forces in person, too. She is an orderly seeming presence, with what sound like obsessive workaholic tendencies ("I often finish one project and I am halfway through a bottle of wine and I just think: carry on").

The girlishness of manner belies the kind of journalistic determination that allowed her to get her *Yarl's Wood* drama on stage. She flinches a bit when I describe her work as rooted in anger, thinking of it as something lighter, less earnest, though concedes that she sometimes feels she has no choice but to give certain stories a voice.

One of the difficulties of being engaged with politics in this post-Blair era, she says, is that “it is hard to tell who the good guys are.” She went on the anti-cuts march, but most of her friends not only didn’t go, she suggests, they weren’t even aware it was happening.

Having grown up in Wanstead in east London, the elder daughter of a City analyst father and sign-language teaching mother, she didn’t really start thinking about either writing or politics until she went to university in Edinburgh. The first student play she wrote fell into the hands of an agent and commissions from the Bush theatre and the National studio quickly followed.

Hedda did very well, but the apparent shock tactics of *Tinderbox* were savaged by certain critics. Charles Spencer in the *Telegraph* was particularly vicious, calling Kirkwood’s debut a “festering mixture of irritation and boredom” and a “clapped-out comedy fit for the knacker’s yard.” I assume it is Spencer’s harsh judgment that she is referring to when she says: “There is one review of *Tinderbox* that still makes me very upset and if I wasn’t such a stubborn old cow I may have just given up and stopped writing at that point. I just felt this terrible vitriol behind the words. I was so young and it was awful. I think it must be how people feel when they get to Oxford and they realise everyone is much cleverer than they are. Suddenly you are faced with this panic and doubt.”

One response to that doubt for Kirkwood was to go and work with theatre company Clean Break to put the story of sex trafficking on stage. It was, necessarily, a grounding experience, she says. “The work we did makes you feel, you know, that an artistic life is an incredibly privileged thing. It helped me put a few bad reviews in perspective. The stakes in this are not so high. I don’t have children that I can’t feed.”

After that, Kirkwood has hardly paused for breath, apparently. Among the projects she is currently engaged with, apart from the Royal Court play, are a reimagining of *Hansel and Gretel* for the National, a drama series for Sky One about firemen (“I like to think of it as London’s *Not Burning*”) and a three-part series for Channel 4 about pornography, which is a reported offshoot of the preoccupations of *NSFW*.

The more she has researched, the more disturbed she has become. “We are all sort of pretending it is not happening. I think 12 is the average age for boys to see their first pornography these days, but that doesn’t mean picking up a copy of *Razzle* from a railway siding; it is like some woman having an object shoved into her anus on a sort of high-definition film. I have a friend who is a teacher who had to leave her job because a 15-year-old boy stuck a camera up her skirt and put it online.

“Boys are being force-fed this very plastic sexuality on a mass scale. It is not something they have found for themselves in a way. There is no discovery. The internet says, you know, ‘The rest of your life you will find enormous boobs out there.’ The question is how do you kind of reboot from that position?”

Her play aims to highlight some of the implications of that question, without attempting conclusions. “I don’t think the play offers any solutions,” she says. “It tries to suggest love as a thing to cling to when everything else is being eroded. But of course I don’t have any answers; none of us does.” ■

2. Resources for Discussing “Consent”

NSFW addresses issues of consent and privacy and the impact of digital media on both. Take some time to discuss what consent means with your students. As critical dialogue around rape culture increases in our society, and more people are engaging in the conversations, more and more resources can be found espousing different approaches and points of view regarding the nature of consent and the most effective ways to talk about it. Here are two examples to consider and begin your own classroom dialogue.

Wanna Have Sex? (Consent 101)

Check out Sex Educator **Laci Green**’s popular video, promoting a “**consent is sexy**” message:
[youtube.com/watch?v=TD2EooMhqRI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TD2EooMhqRI)

Then consider...

Why Consent Doesn’t Need to Be “Sexy”

By writer and comedian **Catherine McCormick**:
shedoesthecity.com/why-consent-doesnt-need-to-be-sexy

3. Resources for Addressing Eating Disorders

While eating disorders are not explicitly discussed in NSFW, we believe that any in-depth discussion of beauty standards, gender norms and media representations is incomplete without the acknowledgement of this very real and very serious illness that affects so many in our communities. The following material may benefit your students.

Not only do the media promote damaging images that perpetuate feelings of insecurity and self-loathing, but lots of TV programs, films and magazines also promote eating disorders and obsessive dieting as desirable, “cool” and even normal. Please remember that eating disorders are neither normal nor healthy. An eating disorder is a very serious illness that, at its worst, can be fatal. Since many of us, to varying degrees, have dealt with body image and food-related insecurities in our lives, it is easy to think that we can provide all the help and support a friend or student struggling with an eating disorder needs. While a good support network is essential to the recovery of eating disorder patients, it is imperative that teachers and students understand that they alone cannot help someone suffering from an eating disorder. If you have a friend (or a student) with an eating disorder, it is your responsibility to speak to your teacher, guidance counsellor, or a parent about it – just as you would were a student to disclose her or his intent to commit suicide.

Here is some brief background information on eating disorders and body image, together with a number of resources for those seeking more information and assistance, provided by Ruth Masliyah of The Hospital for Sick Children.

Eating Disorders: General Information

From the Center for Young Women’s Health

youngwomenshealth.org/2012/04/11/eating-disorders/

Eating disorders affect millions of teens and young adults around the world. They’re most common in cultures that focus on weight and body image and can affect people of all genders, races and ethnic backgrounds. People who have a negative body image and those who diet are at risk of developing an eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia, binge eating disorder, or a category called other specified feeding or eating disorder (OSFED).

Eating disorders have serious health consequences and require treatment. Recovery is likely with the help of specially trained health care providers and a supportive family.

What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders are complicated medical and psychological conditions that affect a person’s physical and emotional health and involve intense emotions and behaviors around food.

Eating disorders are very dangerous illnesses and can lead to permanent consequences if left untreated.

The four types of eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, and other specified feeding or eating disorder (OSFED).

1. **Anorexia** (pronounced: an-or -rex-e-ah) involves food restriction (limiting or not having certain foods or food groups). People with anorexia drastically limit their food intake and have an intense fear of gaining weight, even though they are underweight.
2. **Bulimia** (pronounced: bull-e-me-ah) involves cycles of binge eating followed by a purging behavior. People with bulimia will eat an unusually large amount of food in a

short period of time and then exercise excessively or purge by vomiting, using laxatives, enemas or diuretics as a way to avoid gaining weight.

3. **Binge eating disorder** involves eating an unusually large amount of food in a short period of time and feeling a loss of control during this episode. Binge eaters do not purge afterwards, but often feel a lot of shame or guilt about their binge eating.
4. **Other specified feeding or eating disorder** (OSFED) involves some combination of symptoms of the other eating disorders such as an intense fear of weight gain and a preoccupation with food (thinking about food or having food related thoughts most of the day). Many people with OSFED have symptoms of the other eating disorders, but may not meet the exact criteria, and therefore are diagnosed with OSFED. People with OSFED have some of the symptoms of anorexia, bulimia or binge eating disorder, but don't meet all of the criteria for diagnosis.

Disordered eating is a term used to describe when someone doesn't have all the symptoms of an eating disorder, but their eating patterns and behaviors put them at risk for developing an eating disorder. For example, anorexia can start when dieting becomes too extreme; binge eating disorder or bulimia can start because dieting often restricts the amount and types of food, so when a diet is broken, it can lead to uncontrollable eating and loss of control around food.

Prevalence rates, or how often eating disorders occur varies with each disorder. While anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are fairly rare, binge eating disorder and OSFED are slightly more common. A study done in 2011 estimated that 0.3% of Americans between the ages of 13–18 suffer from anorexia, 0.9% from bulimia, and 1.6% from binge eating disorder (Swanson et al. 2011). Estimates of OSFED differ from study to study, but may be as high as 15%.

Body Image and Self-Esteem: Teens are constantly exposed to unrealistic standards in the media such as airbrushed images and very skinny models and may feel pressure to lose weight or look a certain way. Because of these pressures, many teenagers develop bad body image and self-esteem. Although it's normal for teenagers to not feel completely content with their bodies because they're constantly changing, it's important for teens to find ways to feel comfortable with the natural shape and size of their bodies.

Body distortion: Body distortion is when someone sees her or his body shape, size and appearance differently from what everyone else sees. Body distortion causes a person to over-focus on flaws or imperfections that they are insecure about. Most people who struggle with an eating disorder have body distortion issues that are very hard to get rid of, because they often worry about how they look and what people think of them.

How do I improve my body image?

- Start by writing down or journaling about 5 parts of your body that you like (ears, eyes, legs, teeth, hair, etc.).
- Write down things that your body can do when it's healthy (running, dancing, hiking, biking, etc.).
- Write down 10 things you like about yourself (caring, responsible, funny, smart, creative, etc.).
- Make a list of accomplishments you are proud of.
- Buy clothes that you feel comfortable in and give away any that make you feel self-conscious or uncomfortable.
- Relax. Take a bath, listen to music, play a game, sing or meditate.

- Spend time with positive people who make you feel comfortable and you can be yourself around.
- Remind yourself that everyone's body is different and that not everyone is meant to be the same shape or size.
- Be critical of advertisements, magazines and the media. Many people will write letters to a company if they find their ads or articles upsetting or hurtful.
- Make yourself smile when you look in the mirror. It might feel weird at first, but after a while, you could start to notice a difference in the way you see yourself.

Resources for parents seeking help

Sheena's Place: group therapy in downtown Toronto
sheenasplace.org

SickKids Hospital
sickkids.ca/psychiatry/what-we-do/clinical-care/eating-disorders-program/

North York General Hospital
nygh.on.ca/Default.aspx?cid=1230&

South Lake Regional Health Centre: a leader in assessment and treatment for adolescent eating disorders in Central East Ontario including Peterborough, Haliburton, Durham Region, Simcoe County, Kawartha, Pine Ridge and York Region
southlakeregional.org/Default.aspx?cid=609

F. Glossary of Terms

NSFW is a British play set in London. Students will likely be unfamiliar with a few of the references, people, places, words or phrases. The occasional missed reference won't hinder the viewer's experience. Nonetheless, here's a reference guide to help contextualize some of the play's references for a young Canadian audience. They appear chronologically according to when they come up in the play.

revising

When Charlotte asks Sam what he was doing at age 18 he replies, "Revising." This means he was spending his time studying.

C2Des

This refers to a group of people in the lower three socioeconomic categories – a way for the magazines to assess readers' spending power. Aidan refers to these people as the main readership for *Doghouse Magazine*.

ABC1s

Conversely, these are the people from the three top socioeconomic categories, meaning they've attained a higher level of formal education and earn more money. Aidan's goal is for *Doghouse Magazine* to begin accessing this readership. Miranda boasts that this is the readership of *Electra Magazine*.

Nancy Mitford

A mid-20th century British writer – her most popular novel was *Love in a Cold Climate*. Aidan suggests this title for a story in *Doghouse*, which elicits Charlotte's sarcastic quip about Nancy Mitford.

"Harold and Maude"

A well-known 1971 film about a romance between a young man and an elderly woman. Rupert uses the reference to tease Sam about the fact that he has an older girlfriend.

gonzo journalism

A style of journalism that is subjective and personal, often including the writer's personal experience in the story. Now a popular phrase, it was first used to describe writer Hunter S. Thompson in the 1970s.

Budgens

A grocery store chain. Rupert mentions that a woman he slept with worked at one.

Kendal Mint Cake

A chocolate-covered peppermint treat, popular with mountain climbers because of the energy burst it delivers. Aidan includes this reference when taunting Rupert about how he's sending him to the Arctic against his will.

Louise Mensch

Novelist and Conservative MP in the UK. *Doghouse* is preparing to run an interview with her.

gilet

A vest. Charlotte explains to Aidan that when she began in magazine journalism she, "didn't know what a gilet was," illustrating her lack of expertise in the world of fashion.

Eton

The prestigious boys' boarding school attended by the most privileged of Britain's high society including Princes William and Harry. Throwing his class, privilege and status in his face, Aidan calls Rupert a "fucking Eton mess."

troglodyte

Technically ancient people who dwelled in caves, Miranda refers to Aidan disparagingly as a troglodyte, referring to his lack of civility and sophistication much as one would refer to someone as a Neanderthal.

The Guardian

A highly regarded national daily newspaper.

G. Major Themes: Classroom Discussion & Activities

1. *Theatrical Presentation*

a) ISSUE-BASED THEATRE

Studio 180 is unique in that we produce plays that speak to socially and politically relevant issues. With your class, examine the company's Vision and Mission statements.

Vision: The experience of live performance inspires people to engage more fully in the world

Mission: To produce socially relevant theatre that provokes public discourse and promotes community engagement

1. What do these statements mean to you? Does Studio 180's Vision resonate and have meaning? How effectively do you think the company's Mission serves its Vision? How does this production of *NSFW* work toward fulfilling our Mission?

***HINT:** Some prompt questions – How did the play provoke you to engage in the world differently? What conversations did you have with friends after seeing the play? What surprised you about the play? After seeing the play do you have new questions about the way girls and women are represented in the media, the standards and expectations you set for yourself and others, what you would be willing to sacrifice in order to keep a job, or any other questions or thoughts inspired by the play?*

2. **Why live theatre?** What makes theatre an effective art form through which to explore themes, issues and human behaviour? There is no shortage of books, essays, magazines, blogs and documentaries that address the same issues as *NSFW*. What is unique about live theatre? Consider what is specific about your intellectual, emotional and communal responses to attending live theatre, compared to engaging in other forms of art, communication and media.

***HINT:** How does live theatre HUMANIZE issues and why is the humanization of social and political issues important?*

3. Brainstorm issues that you would like to see turned into a piece of theatre. If you were going to see another play, or write a play yourself, what would you want it to be about? This question may serve as a jumping off point for **drama students** to begin their own issue-based theatre projects around stories and topics of particular relevance to them.

b) POINTS OF VIEW – CHARACTERS

One way we hope theatre will be an effective tool to explore important issues is through the portrayal of multiple perspectives or points of view. How effective is *NSFW* in exploring different sides of a story, question or topic? Was the play even-handed? Did you feel that a multitude of opinions and points of view were expressed? Were the characters portrayed fairly? Which characters and stories were the most memorable? Which voices remained with you longest and why? Which moments had the greatest impact? Which characters surprised you? Did the play create questions for you regarding the characters or their circumstances? Did you form an emotional attachment to any of the characters? Who did you want to hear from more? Did you disagree with what some of the characters were saying? What would you ask those characters, given the opportunity?

c) POINTS OF VIEW – PLAYWRIGHT

What do you think the playwright's point of view is regarding the characters she has created? How is Lucy Kirkwood commenting on the characters, their relationships and society as a whole?

HINT: During an exploration of these questions there might well be as many different answers as there are students in the class. Use this discussion to **highlight the significant role the audience plays at the theatre** and how audience interpretation is equally as important as the author's intention. Here is a **fun activity** that illustrates this concept:

SCULPTING

Activity goals:

- Get students out of their heads and into their bodies in a fun and creative way
- Challenge students to express themselves physically
- Enhance verbal and non-verbal communication and cooperation skills
- Explore the exciting ways in which art can have multiple meanings and interpretations for both the creator and the audience/viewer

•Step by step:

1. Select one student to be the SCULPTOR and four students to be the CLAY.
2. Select a title for the sculpture (this can be designated by the teacher or offered by the class – we like to use theme-based words from the play but you can also use your imagination and come up with things like invented play or movie titles).
3. Designate a brief amount of time (10–30 seconds) in which the SCULPTOR may sculpt.
4. The SCULPTOR must then use the designated title to silently create a sculpture in the allotted time. This can be done with MIRRORING (the SCULPTOR positions him or herself and the CLAY must imitate precisely) or by physically positioning the CLAY.
5. Ask the SCULPTOR to describe their masterpiece and then invite class members (art critics, gallery patrons, etc.) to describe what they see.
6. The activity can be repeated in any number of configurations (e.g., in pairs, with multiple groups of three, four, five or more, etc.)

d) CHARACTERS – WHO GETS A VOICE?

Six actors portray six different characters in *NSFW*, but there is another significant character in the play. **“Carrie” has a name, but no voice.** We see an image of her and we hear others describe her. We never meet her and we never get to hear what she has to say. We have no insight into her experience, thoughts, feelings or point of view.

How much of **what others say** about Carrie (e.g., her father) or **how they represent her** (e.g., the photo taken and submitted by her boyfriend) is reliable? What do we trust or believe? How do our own ideas, beliefs and experiences fill in the blanks as our imaginations piece together who this person is?

What do you think the playwright is saying by including a character who never gets to speak for herself? How is Carrie's literal silence a **metaphor** for the way **girls and women are silenced in the media and in society**?

How are women like Carrie routinely **objectified** in magazines and other media? **What does it mean to be an object rather than a subject?** What is the connection between the absence of

Carrie's voice in *NSFW* and the problem of girls and women being objectified in the media? Why do you think the playwright chose to include this character as she did – being spoken of, described, photographed and exhibited, but never appearing on stage and having the opportunity to speak for herself?

WRITING ACTIVITY

Create a developed character for Carrie and write a scene in which she appears. It can occur at any point chronologically during the play – use your imagination and be creative! Who are the other characters in the scene? Why does Carrie arrive? Where is she coming from? What does she want and need? How does she change the course of action for herself and the other characters?

e) STRUCTURE

What is the **dramatic structure** of *NSFW* and how does it resemble or differ from other plays you've seen? How does the playwright use **time** and **space** to tell the story? Is the narrative linear and chronological? How do the play and the production deal with **jumps in time** and what is the effect? How does the playwright juxtapose two settings to tell her story? What is the effect of this **juxtaposition**?

f) STYLE – SATIRE

Satire is the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt or scorn. In satire, human vice or folly is attacked through irony, derision or wit. It differs from comedy in that comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself, while satire "derides"; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt existing outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual, or a type of person, a class, a nation, or even all of humanity. Literary techniques include parody, irony, sarcasm and the use of caricature.

Who is Lucy Kirkwood satirizing in *NSFW*? Who are the *butts* she is targeting?

1. Which characters are most sharply satirized? What is the playwright trying to communicate by portraying these specific characters this way?
2. What specific techniques does Kirkwood use in her satiric exploration?
3. What is the effect of the use of humour to explore serious issues like class and gender? Why do you think the playwright chose to write this style of play? How did it make you feel to be in the audience?
4. With your class, explore other examples of satire through the use of television, film or video clips. Discuss what you watch and conduct a conversation about what the pieces make you think and feel. Is satire an effective tool for engaging in social and political issues? Does it get you thinking? What kinds of questions does it challenge you to ask? Can it inspire action or change? An example of satire that pertains thematically to *NSFW*, by Rebecca Vipond Brink, can be found in **Section H1** of this Study Guide – we recommend using this as an example and discussing its effectiveness and impact.

g) PROMOTION & MARKETING

Take a look at Studio 180's marketing and promotional materials for *NSFW*. You can find a reduced-size version of the poster in **Appendix A** of this Study Guide. What does it tell you about the show? How much information is provided and how much is left to the imagination? Do you think this is an effective marketing tool?

VISUAL ART & MEDIA ACTIVITIES

1. **Design your own poster for a production of *NSFW*.** This can include original illustrations or photographs. Which cut lines from the press, quotations from the script, or descriptions of the play would you incorporate? What colour palette would you choose? If you were producing the show at your school, where would you decide to display the posters in your school and community?
2. Join Studio 180 Theatre's [Facebook](#) page and follow us on [Twitter](#). Spend some time following our social media promotional campaign for the show and create a critique of our online marketing strategy. How does Studio 180 utilize social media to promote our work? If you were to take charge of a social media campaign to promote a show, what strategies would you employ? What would you borrow from Studio 180 and what would you do differently?

h) DESIGN

How did the design of the production affect the presentation of the piece? Was the **set naturalistic or abstract**? What did the set and **props** evoke, represent or symbolize? Did they offer clues about the story, circumstances or characters inhabiting the space? How was **lighting** used to create mood or ambience? Did lighting work to define space and setting? How was **sound and music** used to affect the presentation? How were **costumes** used to define characters? How did the costume designer make use of **colour, texture and style**?

i) ARCHITECTURE & SPACE

NSFW is among the first productions to go up at the newly renovated Theatre Centre, in what was once an historic Carnegie Library. What was it like to see a play in this particular performance space? What architectural elements are unique to this space and how did they affect the experience as a whole? If you have been to other plays in other theatres, how did the experience compare?

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

Have your students research the historic Carnegie Library building, the building's history, its significance to the neighbourhood and the West Queen West neighbourhood itself.

How has this neighbourhood changed, evolved and gentrified over the last decade? What role do you anticipate The Theatre Centre and Studio 180 Theatre will play in the evolution of the neighbourhood?

2. Media Representations

We love the ways various types of art and expression can inform one another, contributing to a richer, fuller dialogue about issues and questions that resonate for us. After seeing *NSFW* we recommend that you...

- Spend some time in the upstairs lobby at The Theatre Centre, where Studio 180 is hosting an **art exhibit**, curated by [Feminist Art Conference \(factoronto.org\)](http://factoronto.org) and featuring works by local artists. How do these works address the themes of the play? Do any of the pieces prompt further questions? Do any of the pieces provide clarity for you? Do you see any of the pieces differently after watching the play, compared to before entering the theatre?
- Have a class screening of the brilliant documentary *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women*. This 45-minute documentary is the latest instalment by renowned media critic Jean Kilbourne, and presents the most concise, accessible and impactful critical analysis we've seen of the media's objectification of women and the perpetuation of damaging and oppressive beauty standards. You can stream the film for free here: dailymotion.com/video/x1n3d88_killing-us-softly-4_news. For more about Jean Kilbourne and her work, visit jeankilbourne.com.

a) BEAUTY STANDARDS

"She's not perfect. Nobody is perfect. I'm not perfect. Our readers aren't perfect. I need you to point out the ways in which this woman is not perfect."
Miranda, *NSFW*

Beginning with the above quotation and thinking about the entire play, have a class discussion about the beauty standards and norms established for girls and women by society at large and the media in particular. Here are some suggested prompts to get the conversation started:

- What is beautiful? What traits or physical attributes are considered acceptable, beautiful, desirable and sexy? Brainstorm lists of how girls and boys are supposed to look. Are the definitions of beauty and desirability more defined or rigid for one gender?
- What are we expected to do in order to achieve high standards of beauty? What are the grooming and maintenance expectations of boys and girls? What are we allowed to eat? How much money do we need to spend? What kind of pain should we be inflicting on our bodies?
- How did *NSFW* get you thinking about the ways girls and women are portrayed in magazines? Are the *Doghouse* images and/or the standards promoted by *Electra* familiar to you? What was surprising for you?
- Put yourself in the characters' shoes: What would it be like to be Charlotte, Sam or Miranda? How are they each impacted by the unattainable beauty standards set by the magazine industry of which they are a part? How does Charlotte feel about herself when she is surrounded by objectifying, photo-shopped images on a daily basis? How do you think Sam's experience at *Doghouse* affected his relationship with his girlfriend? If Sam ends up working at *Electra*, how will it impact the way he sees women and his future relationships with women? How do you think Miranda feels about herself? How does she think about her appearance and how much time, effort and money does she spend on

personal grooming? What does she value in herself and how does that impact her personal and professional relationships?

- Compare and contrast *Doghouse* and *Electra* magazines and the ways in which they perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards. Is one more damaging than the other? What media do you engage with in your own lives that perpetuate these beauty standards? How do these representations make you feel about your self? Your body? Your identity? Your value and worth? How do they impact the way you relate to other people?
- Are we impacted by magazine, film and TV images differently based on our race? Is there a mainstream standard for beauty and perfection based on race? How are girls and women of colour impacted differently from white girls and women, when bombarded by images of our society's ideal? Enhance the conversation by reading, "My Boss Asked Me to Straighten My Afro – So I Quit," by Canadian TV celebrity Arisa Cox, included in **Section H4** of this Study Guide. Discuss your responses to the article and how Cox's story relates to *NSFW*.

MEDIA ACTIVITY

Read Big Brother Canada host Arisa Cox's article, recently published in the *Huffington Post*, about her experience as an on-air TV journalist. You can find it in **Section H4** of this Study Guide. You can also read it directly online, as it was published first in the *Toronto Star* (http://www.thestar.com/life/2014/08/05/i_stood_firm_on_my_hair_and_won_selfrespect.html) and subsequently in the *Huffington Post* (http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/arisa-cox/natural-hair_b_5662219.html) with a few updates. Visit both links and compare and contrast the way the article is presented or "spun" by each media outlet. Why do you think each outlet chose the title and photo they did? How are the presentations different and what do they communicate? Who do you think the target audience is for each outlet and how does that impact their choice of presentation? Which article speaks to you with greater impact and why?

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

What standard of beauty and personal grooming does our culture impose on women? What procedures, rituals and even surgeries do we consider normal? **Visual Art** and **Gender Studies** students should check out Australian photographer Jessica Ledwich's visually stunning yet disturbing photo series *Monstrous Feminine* (<http://www.jessicaledwich.com/monstrous-feminine.html>) – a compelling and impactful critique of beauty standards and expectations. Ledwich's photos provide a perfect visual complement to the play because, like Lucy Kirkwood's work, the photos encourage us to move beyond acceptance of these standards and force us to confront uncomfortable, grotesque truths.

WARNING: In keeping with the title of the play, some of the images are *NSFW*.

b) DOUBLE STANDARDS

“Each week we get a man, well, Rupert, to investigate a different aspect of normal female experience. He walked down Oxford Street in a miniskirt, he’s had his eyebrows threaded... he’s been on Atkins since October... He’s off to Brazil next week...”

Miranda, *NSFW*

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a double standard as “a situation in which two people, groups, etc., are treated very differently from each other in a way that is unfair to one of them.” How do the above quotation and *Electra*’s “How It Feels for a Girl” feature highlight a double standard in our culture? Lead your class in a discussion of the numerous ways in which different rules and standards are applied to men and women. Here are some prompts to kick-start the discussion:

- Identify the different grooming and diet regimens Rupert is subjected to. Are these considered normal female activities? Why are they considered laughable and even demeaning when practiced by a man?
- In addition to expectations about grooming and personal appearance, what other double standards does the play point out? What gender-based double standards have you experienced or witnessed in your own life (e.g., boys are celebrated for their sexual prowess while girls are “slut-shamed” or derided for their sexuality)?
- What personality attributes are considered positive for boys and negative for girls, and vice versa? Brainstorm traits associated with boys and girls – which do you consider stereotypes? Which are you expected to embody? What positive male attributes have corresponding negative descriptors that are typically reserved for women (e.g., men are “opinionated” while women are “strident,” men are “assertive” while women are “pushy”)? What words have positive connotations for women but are considered negative or laughable traits for men (e.g., “pretty” or “soft”)?
- Does our culture (including our media) promote double standards when it comes to attributes such as race, class, age or sexual orientation?

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

Check out **Sections H1, H2 & H3** of this Study Guide, for three articles that will significantly enhance your exploration of double standards and gender representations in the media. Read one or more and ask the following: What parts of the article resonate for you? What is familiar? What is surprising? What rings true and what does not? What do the articles illuminate about your experience at the theatre seeing *NSFW*? What moments from the play are clarified? What new questions are brought to light?

c) AGEISM

“One day your ex-girlfriend will no longer be twenty-two and slim and smooth. There will come a day when builders don’t whistle. When schoolboys at bus stops no longer whisper as she passes. When men on Tube trains no longer want to rub their genitalia on her. And when that day comes, do you know how she’ll feel?... She’ll feel like a fucking ghost.”
 Miranda, *NSFW*

The above excerpt from *NSFW* offers a disturbing revelation as it turns the more common and acceptable narrative about sexual harassment on its head. Discuss Miranda’s statement and what it illuminates about how older women are represented in the media and what that means for us as a culture. Here are some suggested prompts to get the conversation started:

- What do you think of Miranda’s statement and how it speaks to the way our culture prizes youth? How does the media represent young versus old people?
- Why do you think Miranda says this to Sam? What does it tell us about Miranda’s relationship to youth and aging? What does it indicate to you about her character – what kind of person is she? What is her backstory? What are her fears? What is her relationship to her work and her coworkers/employees?

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

Explore the complexities of Miranda’s statement, which makes us grapple with the conflict between our understanding of sexual harassment and the pervasive demonization of aging in our culture.

Step 1. Do some research, thinking and talking about sexual harassment and street harassment. Why are unwanted and unsolicited sexual advances and catcalls problematic? Should this behaviour be acceptable in our society? How does it impact women and girls and what does its prevalence indicate about the ways in which girls’ and women’s bodies are objectified in our culture? About how girls’ and women’s bodies are controlled? What does it say about restrictions our culture places on girls and women to exist in public spaces?

Step 2. Do some research, thinking and talking about how youth and age are represented in mainstream media like magazine and TV ads. How old are the models? Compare the number of men versus women over the ages of 30, 40 and 50. What products are women over 40 typically selling? What is the prevalence of cosmetics, drugs and procedures aimed at helping women look or feel younger? After collecting these examples, what conclusions can you draw about our culture’s attitudes toward aging? How might a woman over 40 consuming this media feel about her body, her appearance, her sexuality, her value and her desirability in our culture?

Step 3. Now consider the ways these phenomena coexist in our culture, how they impact our self-worth, identity and sense of value. What does Miranda’s statement mean to you?

3. *Exploitation*

Exploitation is the action or fact of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work or labour. The term can also be used in reference to objects, resources or circumstances. In the context of *NSFW*, we're talking about the exploitation of people. In more colloquial terms, this is the taking advantage of or "using" of people – predominantly for financial gain. After seeing the play, have a class discussion about the ways different characters are exploited in *NSFW*.

a) **WORKER EXPLOITATION**

"I can't afford to work for free anymore."
Sam, *NSFW*

The degree and extent to which workers are exploited is broad. In the most extreme case, there is slavery – the ultimate exploitation of another person's labour. The extent to which slaves are exploited is so severe that we do not consider the beneficiaries of their labour to be "employers"; rather, one who benefits from a slave's labour is an "owner." This language of ownership and property is significant in that it highlights the fact that the slave is reduced to an object. This is a blatant act of dehumanization. But what happens when the lines are not so clear? When the relationship between employer and employee becomes increasingly blurry?

There are many examples, less severe than slavery, of workers being significantly mistreated and exploited for the benefit of their employers. While the workers do not become the absolute property of their owners, there is still a degree of dehumanization. E.g., in North America, a number of factors contribute to making migrant farm workers and domestic workers particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Employers take advantage of poor, vulnerable workers desperate for employment, sometimes hiring them "under the table" or illegally, paying them low wages (often below minimum wage) and disregarding health and safety standards such as length of shifts, adequate breaks or safety regulations. Unlike slaves, these workers are compensated, though not in accordance with what our society deems "fair." In most cases of worker exploitation, there is a class distinction between the poor worker and the wealthy boss/employer. In many cases, workers and bosses are also distinguished by race, ethnicity, language and nationality.

But let's get back to the play and that subtle or "blurry" form of exploitation we mentioned above. This type of worker exploitation is far less severe and arguably less damaging and problematic than the examples cited above. It is a paradigm of exploitation that targets primarily working and middle-class people rather than the most impoverished and disenfranchised of our communities and, in these instances, the employer and employee are frequently on par with one another in terms of socioeconomic status and identifiers such as class, gender, race and nationality (though these distinctions may be present and may exacerbate the inequalities of the employer/employee relationship). This is one of the types of exploitation in the workplace that *NSFW* explores. Here are some suggested prompts to kick-off a conversation:

- Which characters are exploited at *Doghouse* and *Electra* and in what ways?
- Is there a class distinction among the young employees at *Doghouse*? Which character has the lowest socioeconomic status? Does this make him more vulnerable to exploitation? Which character has high socioeconomic status? What benefits seem to follow from that class distinction?

HINT: Here's an excerpt from a Rupert speech that might be useful for this discussion:
"That's what a trust fund means, not having to take this sort of shit from people like you."

- Is Charlotte more vulnerable to exploitation (and different types of exploitation) at *Doghouse* because of her gender and, if so, how?
- Charlotte, Sam and Rupert are all young, eager workers with professional aspirations in a competitive industry. How does this make them vulnerable to exploitation by employers? Students may wish to do some research into various media and other industries to find out about standards, norms and regulations regarding unpaid internships and starting salaries. Which industries are especially brutal? Among which industries are young people most expected to “pay their dues”?
- In what other ways do we see exploitation occurring in *NSFW*? What does Aidan exploit about Mr. Bradshaw? What does *Electra* exploit in the women it targets, in order to sustain itself and generate profit?

HINT: The documentary *Killing Us Softly 4* is an excellent resource for understanding the ways advertisers and fashion magazines exploit women’s fears and insecurities for profit (dailymotion.com/video/x1n3d88_killing-us-softly-4_news).

b) SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

“This is not that sort of publication. We have nothing but the deepest respect for the women, the legally adult women, that we feature on our pages.”
Aidan, *NSFW*

Continue the conversation about exploitation in *NSFW* with a focus on how characters are exploited sexually. Begin with these suggested prompts:

- Respond to Aidan’s statement, above. Does he believe that the women featured in *Doghouse* are exploited? Do you believe Aidan has deep respect for women? What does **respect** mean to you and is it compatible with the types of images found in *Doghouse*?
- Is Carrie being exploited and if so, by whom? She is a particularly interesting character because she never actually appears on stage (other than in a photograph). There are numerous discrepancies in the story of how Carrie wound up on the pages of *Doghouse*. We get to hear her father’s point of view, the story put forward by her boyfriend (via Sam) and speculation on the part of Aidan. But we never hear from Carrie herself. What do you think the “true” story is, and why?
- How is Carrie objectified in her photo? How are the other women featured in *Doghouse* objectified? What is **objectification** and what is the effect on the person being objectified? What is the effect on those who objectify others? What is the effect on the readers of *Doghouse* and similar magazines? Might male and female readers of *Doghouse* and similar magazines be impacted differently? Why or why not?
- In our earlier discussion of exploitation, we brought up the concept of dehumanization. What is the **connection between objectification and dehumanization**? How can images of women, such as those featured in *Doghouse*, serve to make women feel less than human? What impact might this have on women in general? What impact might this have on the men who engage with these images?
- In the above quotation from Aidan, he makes a distinction between 14-year-old Carrie and “the legally adult women,” that typically populate *Doghouse*. **Why does age**

matter? Is Carrie being exploited because she is 14 rather than 18? What would be different from a **legal standpoint** if Carrie were, in fact, 18? What would be different from a **moral standpoint**? In the play, Bradshaw asserts, “Eighteen’s different to fourteen.” Is he right? What do you think? Consider how Rupert challenges Aidan when Carrie’s age is revealed to the staff at *Doghouse*: “Mate, ten minutes ago you were basically rubbing yourself off to her, suddenly her tits are out of bounds?” What does the play illuminate regarding the fine line our culture draws when it comes to acceptable sexuality and the age of consent? What does the play illuminate about our culture’s attitudes toward female objectification?

c) FETISHIZATION OF YOUTH

“At least last year’s had the reading age of a grown-up.”
Charlotte, *NSFW*

What is a **fetish**? And what does it mean to **fetishize** something? Research this terminology and then discuss how youth is fetishized at *Doghouse*. These prompts will help you begin a conversation:

- How is youth fetishized at *Doghouse*? Site examples and draw connections between the images promoted by *Doghouse* and our culture’s obsession with youth.
- Is it surprising to you that the photo of Carrie is the contest winner? Are sexualized images of girls and women in the media familiar or unfamiliar? Look for real life examples of images (magazines, billboards and other advertisements) that promote youth either in a sexual or nonsexual way.
- In what ways does *Electra* (and the real life magazines exemplified by *Electra*) fetishize youth? Can you form comparisons between the ways in which youth and age are represented by *Doghouse* and *Electra*? What is the attitude to youth and aging in each magazine and how are these attitudes similar or different?
- How do *Doghouse* and corresponding real life magazines **infantilize** women? Research this terminology and discuss its meaning both in response to *NSFW* and to images of women you see in the media.
- **Do you think our culture is obsessed with youth?** Why or why not? What are our culture’s attitudes toward youth and aging? How are we all impacted by media messages about youth, aging and desirability? How do these images help shape our conceptions of gender? How do these images contribute to our feelings of value and self-worth?

d) VOICE

“

”

Carrie, *NSFW*

We see a photograph of Carrie and we hear people talk about her, but no actor portrays her onstage and we never get to meet her or hear her point of view. Why? Here are some suggested prompts to begin a discussion about Carrie's voice and questions of voice and voicelessness in society:

- Why do you think Lucy Kirkwood chose to tell the story without including Carrie's voice? What impact does that have and what does her voicelessness represent?

HINT: *How might the character of Carrie be understood as a metaphor?*

- What is the relationship between Carrie's **objectification** and her **voicelessness** in *NSFW*? How are girls and women **silenced** when they are **objectified** in the media?

WRITING ACTIVITY

What does it mean to *have a voice*? What does it mean to be *voiceless*? What does it mean to *speak out* and what does it mean to be *silenced*? **English, Writer's Craft** and **Drama** students can create poems, personal essays, short stories or monologues inspired by these phrases and the theme of *voice*.

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

Senior **Gender Studies** and **College/University** students may want to explore the relationship between **silencing** and **violence**. How can we understand gender-based violence within the context of a culture that systematically silences women?

Read the following excerpt from noted writer/activist **Rebecca Solnit's** 2008 landmark essay "Men Explain Things to Me" to begin the conversation:

"Violence is one way to silence people, to deny their voice and their credibility, to assert your right to control over their right to exist. About three women a day are murdered by spouses or ex-spouses in this country. It's one of the main causes of death for pregnant women in the United States. At the heart of the struggle of feminism to give rape, date rape, marital rape, domestic violence, and workplace sexual harassment legal standing as crimes has been the necessity of making women credible and audible."

This piece, together with Solnit's 2013 essay "The Longest War" can be found as originally posted at TomDispatch.com and are included in **Sections H5 & H6** of this Study Guide.

e) PERSONAL INTEGRITY

*“I am actually part of a group, a women’s group and I sort of.
Lie to them. About what I do.”*
Charlotte, *NSFW*

In *NSFW*, personal integrity is challenged and each character confronts difficult questions about if and when to do the right thing. What are the competing interests that challenge each character’s integrity? Discuss how each character struggles with their integrity, personal values and sense of self, and what questions these struggles prompt about your own life and choices. Here are some suggested starting points for discussion:

- What is each character willing to sacrifice in order to keep/get a job?
- When do characters choose financial gain over other competing interests? Is there an emotional cost for this financial success?
- Which characters are self-aware regarding the ways in which they lack integrity, and how are they impacted by this awareness?
- Do any of the characters maintain their integrity and, if so, in what ways?
- When has your personal integrity been challenged? Describe a time when you felt that you lacked integrity? How did this make you feel? Would you do anything differently if you had the chance to do it over?
- Describe a time when you made sacrifices in order to maintain your integrity. What was the result and how did this make you feel?
- In this Study Guide’s section on beauty standards (**Section G2a**), we recommended the article “My Boss Asked Me to Straighten My Afro – So I Quit,” by Arisa Cox (included in **Section H4**). This is also a perfect article to read and discuss in relation to questions about personal integrity, how far we are willing to go to keep a job, and when we say “enough is enough” and choose to draw a line in the sand.

4. Privacy & Consent

a) PRIVACY

“I mean, it’s none of their business. The public.”
Sam, *NSFW*

At *Doghouse*, what does Aidan ask Sam to do and why does he refuse? What are his arguments and beliefs when it comes to privacy? Here are some suggested prompts to begin a discussion about questions of privacy in *NSFW* and how these questions are interconnected with some of the other themes of the play:

- What are Aidan and *Doghouse*’s attitudes to privacy? Do you see these attitudes reflected in the **mainstream media** around you?
- Take a look at various forms of media and the statements they make about the value of privacy in our culture. What does the prevalence of **daytime talk shows, reality TV and tabloid journalism** say about our culture and the value we place on privacy?
- What is the relationship between privacy and **women’s bodies**? What does a proliferation of celebrity news and magazine tabloids with an emphasis on women’s bodies, weight, fitness, age, pregnancy and general appearance say about our culture and the value of privacy? Are there different standards for men and women? Is there a relationship between the ways the media tries to control women’s bodies and other forms of control exercised over women and their bodies in our society?
- How do **digital technology** and **social media** impact our notions of privacy? Does this generation of youth value privacy differently from past generations? What do you think should be private? What is appropriate use of social media and what crosses a line?
- Regarding **Facebook**, Sam says, “people have their whole lives on there, don’t they?” Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

DRAMA/WRITING ACTIVITY

What do you think happens to Carrie after the action in the play? We never get to hear from Carrie, how she feels about her photo being published in *Doghouse*, or how the publication of the photo impacts her life. **Drama** and **Writer’s Craft** students can write scenes, stories or monologues that imagine Carrie’s experiences.

b) CONSENT

*“And the fact remains that she allowed herself to be photographed,
in this manner.”*
Aidan, *NSFW*

Conversations about the nature of consent are relevant to the play *NSFW* and vital to the wellbeing of your students. Depending on the sexual health education experience of your students, your class may benefit from a basic lesson in consent before engaging in the more sophisticated and complex questions arising in the play. Once you have covered the basics,

we recommend the two resources included in **Section E2** of this Study Guide. They provide two different approaches to the issue of consent and the language we use to talk about consent. Read and watch these together as a class and compare and contrast the two points of view. Which do you think is the better approach to sexuality and consent? Continue the conversation about consent as it pertains to *NSFW*, beginning with these suggested prompts:

- After seeing the play and reading the Aidan quotation above, respond to the question: “Did Carrie consent to have her photo published in *Doghouse*?”
- What are the limits of consent? If Carrie willingly and enthusiastically participated in a private photo shoot with her boyfriend, was she implicitly consenting to the use of that photo for whatever purposes her boyfriend desired? Did he have the right to enter the *Doghouse* photo contest?
- When it comes to the realities of sex, **consent** is complicated. Unwanted sexual encounters are not always as morally unambiguous as a scenario involving an unknown violent attacker. Most sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone known to the victim who may even be a family member or lover or spouse. We tend to think of unwanted sexual encounters as involving physical violence or weapons. While these do occur, there are also many subtle forms of **coercion** that come into play and it can be confusing to navigate this complex territory. Spend some time reading and talking about coercion and the many forms it can take in both sexual and non-sexual circumstances. What does it mean to coerce someone? What are the different ways a person might coerce someone in a variety of different circumstances? What are examples of characters being coerced in *NSFW*?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. **RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT:** Two recent Canadian cases reveal the worst possible results of privacy violations. Both cases prompt questions about the nature of consent, privacy and the impact of digital technologies and social media. Research the stories of **Amanda Todd** and **Rehtaeh Parsons**, young women who took their own lives after enduring harassment and bullying resulting from the dissemination of sexual images. How do their stories speak to questions about **consent, privacy and the digital age**? What do their stories illuminate about **gender norms and expectations, double standards, sexual entitlement, slut-shaming** and **rape culture**?
2. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING:** Depending on your specific students, area of study and curriculum goals, you may be interested in using *NSFW* to promote an even more in-depth exploration of the ways in which media representations of women and gender expectations in our culture are related to **sexual harassment, violence, sexual entitlement** and **rape culture**.

For senior **Gender Studies** and **College/University** students, we highly recommend Rebecca Solnit’s 2014 book of essays, *Men Explain Things to Me*, available for purchase at amazon.ca. Two essays in particular – “Men Explain Things to Me” and “The Longest War” (included in **Sections H5 & H6** of this Study Guide) – directly connect to topics that extend from *NSFW*, and investigate gender norms, assumptions and expectations, and the gendered nature of violence in our culture.

H. Readings for Post-Show Discussion

1. *38 Things Men Can Do to Make Themselves More Attractive to Women*

If you've seen Studio 180's productions of *Clybourne Park* and *God of Carnage*, you know we have a soft spot for satire. Which is one of the reasons why we love Rebecca Vipond Brink's very funny and bang-on beauty tips and relationship advice for men. Because physical expectations and stereotypes of women in mainstream media and culture continue to be so over-the-top absurd, damaging and misogynistic, this satirical approach really nails it.

This piece can enhance class discussions about **gender norms and expectations**, **beauty standards** and **double standards** (see Study Guide **Sections G2a & G2b**) as well as discussions about **satire** (see Study Guide **Section G1f**).

Rebecca Vipond Brink writes about feminism, minimalism, culture, and self-care for [The Frisky](#) and elsewhere, and Hulk-smashes bad rhetoric on her blog, [Flare and Fade](#).

WARNING: In keeping with the title of the play, some of the following language is NSFW.

38 Things Men Can Do to Make Themselves More Attractive to Women

By REBECCA VIPOND BRINK

Published August 6, 2014

[The Frisky](#)

Get ready to take notes...

APPEARANCE

1. **Have long hair.** Everyone knows men with short hair are naturally rebellious and over-opinionated. We don't want that, we want men who are easily controlled.
2. **Spend lots and lots and lots of time making sure you look perfect.** But don't look like you tried too hard.
3. **Look hot enough all the time.** You're not being hot enough. UGH GOD WHY DO YOU HAVE TO BE SO UGLY.
4. **Have soft, exfoliated hands, kissable lips, and wear makeup.** Because your natural body and face are gross and regardless of your feelings about wearing makeup honestly you're going to look like shit without it.
5. **Make sure you have firm pecs and a firm butt.** AW YEAH LOVE THOSE FIRM MAN TITTIES SHAKE IT LIKE A POLAROID PICTURE.
6. **Shave everything. EVERYTHING.** That's right, even your asshole. We want you to look like a hairless little boy.
7. **The natural scent of your body is rank.** Cover it up.
8. **If you have greater than 20% body fat, I feel fucking sorry for you because body fat is a meaningful way of characterizing a human being.** You should probably do something about that.

9. **You should work out, but you shouldn't work out to actually get stronger, you should just work out to "tone" (because that's a thing that exists in the real world).**
No woman wants a man who's overly-muscley, that's gross and it walks all over our perceptions of our own bodily strength.

CLOTHING

10. **Always dress in business clothes. Always.** You like wearing basketball shorts at home?
Too bad. You should be dressing cute for us all the time.
11. **Don't wear the clothes that make you feel comfortable, wear the clothes that will make us spend money on you.** Because everyone knows guys are shallow gold-diggers and women are basically just walking ATMs.
12. **It sucks if you don't have a perfect body (because that's also a thing that exists in the real world). If you're so unfortunate/lazy/pathetic as to not have a body that looks like [Insert Name of Celebrity], then you should at least wear clothes that give you the illusion of kind of sort of starting to have a body that looks like [Insert Name of Celebrity].**
13. **Wear thongs.** So having a piece of cloth shoved up your ass-crack doesn't make you feel sexy? Too bad, we like it.

PERSONALITY

14. **Be nice to everyone all the time no matter what.** No woman is going to want a guy who isn't constantly friendly to everyone no matter how people talk to or treat him.
Know your role.
15. **Smile. Keep smiling. Always smile. WHY AREN'T YOU SMILING?!**
16. **Don't take yourself seriously.** You aren't worth taking seriously, after all.
17. **Don't have your own personality.** If you're a serious person or someone who worries a lot, fuck off, we don't have time for that. All guys are supposed to be bubbly and warm and it's off-putting when you're not.
18. **Act like a playful little kid.** Because acting like a grown adult makes us feel like there's nothing for us to take care of or control.
19. **Don't get emotional.** You're not allowed to have emotions.
20. **Be confident all the time.** Fuck your insecurities, we don't care.
21. **Don't get in our faces. Be subtle. Don't be boisterous.** If you have an outgoing personality or strong opinions, stuff it down, we hate that shit.
22. **Be social, even if you're an introvert and it makes you miserable.**
23. **Stop being dramatic.** God, guys are so fucking dramatic all the time.

BRAIN STUFF

24. **Realize that you have no valid reason to complain about anything ever.**
So don't complain.
25. **Be our arm candy.** God knows no one cares what you have to say, and women aren't going to judge you by your intellect.

LIFE STUFF

26. **Don't have a life history, or don't share it with women.** Basically, pretend you got amnesia right before you met us. We don't want you to have a life that existed before you met us. WE are your life now, got that straight?
27. **Don't make decisions for yourself, let us make them for you.** We call this "letting us take the lead." Because we know what's best for you.
28. **Don't talk about work with us.** Just pretend those eight hours five days a week don't happen. We don't want to know.
29. **Don't enjoy alcohol.** I mean, we can, but you can't. You're supposed to take care of us while we puke and get hung over.
30. **If you have family issues, don't bring it to the relationship.** Just stuff that way, way down, out of our sight.
31. **You should want things but you shouldn't need anything.** If you need someone, you're SOL. You aren't allowed to have needs.

SEX

32. **Make sure you're porn-star awesome in bed.** Otherwise we're not going to want to commit. Oh, but don't have any experience first, we hate sluts (see item 26).
33. **Don't have sexual boundaries.** Just do what we want regardless of your level of comfort or sense of safety. Your willingness to give yourself over to every sexual whim of ours will set you apart from other men.

RELATIONSHIP STUFF

34. **Don't ever, ever, ever talk about our relationship with anyone for any reason.** You think you need advice or have doubts that you want to talk out? You come to *us*. No third-party perspectives allowed.
35. **Give us constant flattery and constant attention.** Do not pay attention to anyone else. Just keep feeding our egos all day long. Like several times a day. But don't be clingy.
36. **Make us sandwiches.** Because we're not capable of making food for ourselves, and you should know by now that it's your role.
37. **Take care of us.** Like, nurture us. As if we're kids. But at the same time let us treat you as if you're immature children. And don't point out the hypocrisy in that, that's not your place. (See item 21.)
38. **Don't have standards.** Give every woman a chance, even if you aren't really that interested in her. She likes you, that's all that matters, because only women's desires matter, duh.

No, no one actually thinks this about dudes. But it is the way people *talk* to women about how we're supposed to approach men, regardless of whether or not y'all actually believe these things. It doesn't feel good, does it? ■

2. Women Take On the “Confidence Gap”

It has become a familiar double standard: Men who are opinionated and driven are considered successful while women exhibiting identical traits are labeled as “bitches.” We love Alice Driver’s fresh and critical approach to this issue and the way she gets us thinking about the **expectations of women in the workplace** and impact of **media representations** of women.

Alice Driver is a writer, filmmaker, editor, and translator whose work explores issues of gender, women’s rights, and human rights with a focus on Mexico. Her writing has been featured in publications such as Ms. Magazine, Women’s Media Center, Salon, Al Jazeera and Open Democracy, and her photography has appeared in National Geographic. She recently finished a [short documentary \(youtube.com/watch?v=V6dyp_rwuqI&list=UUh4pg7EMplhK5nVudGAPZA\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6dyp_rwuqI&list=UUh4pg7EMplhK5nVudGAPZA) about photojournalists in Juarez, Mexico, and is a writer for the United Nations sponsored project Sustainable Energy for All.

Women Take On the “Confidence Gap”

By ALICE DRIVER

Published on April 18, 2014

[Al Jazeera](#)

Why are women perceived negatively when they exhibit confidence?

Either we’re bossy or we’re “bitches,” but whichever it is, we can’t seem to win. The fact is that women in power take a beating (think Hillary Clinton, Sonia Sotomayor, Condoleezza Rice) for being decisive, and that criticism takes the form of everything from analysing the size of our thighs, to discussing our makeup, our child-rearing skills, or, God forbid, our scrunchies.

And then, regardless of how qualified we are for a job, surveys show that if a man and a woman have the same credentials for a job, the man is still judged as more qualified. How confident would men in positions of power feel if they were constantly, over a lifetime, subjected to the same kind of criticism as women about their bodies, their appearance, and the way they raised their children?

This week, *The Atlantic* published yet another article on one of its favourite topics – advice for women. “The Confidence Gap” by Katty Kay and Claire Shipman analyses why there is a confidence gap between men and women, and posits that women lag behind for several factors that range from the environment to differences in male and female brain development.

Like the advice in Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In*, the article identifies the male way of doing things as the standard to live up to, and then gives women advice about how to catch up to the “overconfidence” that gets men so far in life. The unfortunate twist is that when women display confidence in the same ways as men, they are often labelled as “bitches.” The authors discuss how: “If a woman walks into her boss’s office with unsolicited opinions, speaks up first at meetings, or gives business advice above her pay grade, she risks being disliked or even – let’s be blunt – being labelled a “bitch.” The more a woman succeeds, the worse the vitriol seems to get. It’s not just her competence that’s called into question; it’s her very character.”

What also goes unanalysed is the fact that articles like this assume that men set the standard that women have to reach. Kay and Shipman discuss the role of testosterone and confidence and explain that, “Men have about 10 times more testosterone pumping through their system than women do, and it affects everything from speed to strength to muscle size to competitive

instinct. It is thought of as the hormone that encourages a focus on winning and demonstrating power, and for good reason.”

Physiologically, women are never going to compete with that level of testosterone, and, it begs the question: Why do we define testosterone-induced competitive overconfidence as the mark that women need to meet? When, I wonder, will *The Atlantic* publish an article advising men that overconfidence not related to actual skills is an egotistical waste of time?

While Shipman and Kay, like Sandburg, do have good advice for women, they fail to identify the influence of the structural factors that make women less confident. For example, they point out that, “Perfectionism is another confidence killer. Study after study confirms that it is largely a female issue, one that extends through women’s entire lives.”

However, they don’t analyse how perfectionism is demanded from women both by society and by the media, placing expectations on us that are never experienced by men. As feminist superwoman Jessica Valenti commented on Twitter, “Maybe women’s lack of confidence is not a personality flaw, but a predictable response to a culture that tells them they are not good enough.”

While from personal experience I do think that there is a confidence gap, I also know from experience that even women who are naturally confident face a lifetime of criticism that attempts to break down that confidence. This is what the “bitch” complex does – it leaves you damned if you are confident, and generally hated by women and men alike. As it turns out, women also have a long way to go in supporting other confident women, because we tend to judge confident women as “bitches” too.

Shipman and Kay do have good advice, lessons that I will apply to my life. Confidence is important, and tips to improve it are great. However, the main problem with their argument is that it continues to place the burden of responsibility on women, and it doesn’t demand structural changes from society that address the treatment of women.

The authors ask the question: “So what are the implications of all this? The essential chicken-and-egg question still to be answered is to what extent these differences between men and women are inherent, and to what extent they are a result of life experiences.”

Some might argue that women earn 77 cents for every dollar a man earns because they are less confident and negotiate less than men.

However, this argument ignores systemic sexism and structural issues that place women on an unequal playing field professionally. Would we feel more confident if we were respected for being outspoken? If we were rewarded for promoting ourselves like men instead of being judged as egocentric? If our workplace offered affordable childcare? If our bodies were not constantly evaluated in the workplace?

In a society where women are systematically judged as less qualified than men even when they are equally or more qualified, where women are called “bitches” when they speak as much as men, where women, especially women of colour, are paid less than men in every occupation, where rape still inevitably results in a discussion of what a woman was wearing – we need to work on more than confidence. ■

3. *The Ugly, Unfair Truth About Looking Beautiful*

In his thoughtful and insightful essay, William Leith wonders what it feels like to be a woman in a culture that prizes women's beauty above all else. Where the bar of physical perfection is set so unattainably high that even supermodels are Photoshopped. When considering **gender norms, double standards**, our culture's **obsessions with youth and beauty** and **media representations**, we highly recommend including this article, filled with relatable, accessible references, in your curriculum and having a class discussion about student responses.

UK writer William Leith is a regular contributor to The Telegraph, The Guardian, The Spectator, and The Observer. His published books include The Hungry Years, Bits of Me Are Falling Apart, and A Northern Line Minute: The Northern Line.

The Ugly, Unfair Truth About Looking Beautiful

By WILLIAM LEITH

Posted on September 16, 2013

[*The Telegraph*](#)

Why, after decades of feminism, do we seem to demand that women in the public eye be extraordinarily beautiful but their male counterparts can get away with being ordinary?

The art critic John Berger famously said that, in our culture, "men act and women appear." He didn't mean that women didn't actually do anything, or that men never looked pretty. His point was that this was how men and women were depicted.

Men were supposed to be effective, and women were supposed to be attractive. He was right. And it was a travesty. But that was in 1972; it was a long time ago.

Or was it? Four decades of feminism later I am reading the comedian Angela Barnes' blog. "I am ugly, and I am proud," she writes. She goes on to say: "The fact is I don't see people in magazines who look like me. I don't see people like me playing the romantic lead or having a romantic life."

At the top of the blog is a picture of Barnes. And the thing is, she isn't ugly. Neither is she beautiful. She's normal looking. She's somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, just like lots of women you see every day in real life.

It made me think of this year's Wimbledon ladies' final between Sabine Lisicki and Marion Bartoli. When Bartoli won, the BBC commentator John Inverdale infamously said, "Do you think Bartoli's dad told her when she was little, 'You're never going to be a looker, you're never going to be a Sharapova, so you have to be scrappy and fight'?"

The first thing I thought was: this woman has just won a tennis tournament! And she's being judged on her looks! And then I thought: but Bartoli is attractive. Sure, she's not at the very highest point on the scale – she doesn't look like a top model. But she's pretty. And, in any case, why should it matter? She's a top athlete. Surely that's what counts.

A sports commentator refers to a pretty woman as "not a looker." A normal-looking woman thinks she's ugly. Why?

Because, even though the world is full of normal and pretty women, the world we see – the world of television, films, magazines and websites – is full of women who are top-of-the-scale beauties.

And right now, in the second decade of the 21st century, the situation is more extreme than ever. If you're a woman, a huge proportion of your role models are beautiful. So if you're normal looking, you feel ugly. And if you're merely pretty, men feel free to comment on how un-beautiful you are.

As a normal-looking man, I find myself in a completely different position. Being normal makes me feel, well, normal. Absolutely fine. As if the way I look is not an issue. That's because it's not an issue.

As a normal-looking man, I'm in good company. Sure, some male actors and celebrities are very good looking. Brad Pitt. George Clooney. Russell Brand.

But many of Hollywood's leading men, like me, look like the sort of blokes you see every day, in real life. Russell Crowe, Kevin Spacey, Bruce Willis, Jack Black, Seth Rogen, Martin Freeman, Tom Hanks, Steve Carell, Jim Carrey, Will Ferrell, Vince Vaughn, Brendan Fraser... In fact, you might almost say that most leading men are normal-looking blokes.

It's true of television, too. Bryan Cranston, who plays the lead in *Breaking Bad* – he's a normal. James Gandolfini – he was a normal. And chubby too. Kevin Whately – normal. Ben Miller – normal. TV cops all look normal. Ray Winstone looks normal. Tim Roth looks normal. They portray people who are interesting for what they do, not what they look like.

Oh, and think of sitcoms. *The Big Bang Theory* features four normal-looking blokes and a stunningly beautiful woman. *New Girl* is about two normal blokes, a guy who's quite good looking, and two women who are... yes, strikingly beautiful.

When I watch the news, on whatever channel, it's presented by the classic partnership of an ordinary-looking guy and a gorgeous woman. After the news, I watch the weather. Male weather presenters look like standard males. Female weather presenters look like models.

Footballers look normal. Footballers' wives and girlfriends look stunning. Daytime television presenters: men look like Phillip Schofield; women look like Holly Willoughby.

A typical Saturday-night judges' panel consists of two types of people – middle-aged blokes and young, stunning women. Sometimes a normal-looking or ageing woman slips through the net – but then, like Arlene Phillips, her days are soon numbered.

Countdown had an attractive woman and an ageing bloke; when the attractive woman began to show signs of ageing, she was axed – replaced by a woman who was, of course, strikingly beautiful.

Who presents historical documentaries? Guys like David Starkey. Normals. And what happened when a normal-looking woman, Mary Beard, presented a series about the ancient world? She was mocked for not being attractive enough.

In a recent interview Dustin Hoffman, another normal, made a revealing comment. Remember when he dressed up as a woman in *Tootsie*? "I went home and started crying," he said. Why?

"Because I think I am an interesting woman when I look at myself on screen. And I know that if I met myself at a party, I would never talk to that character. Because she doesn't fulfill physically the demands that we're brought up to think women have to have in order to ask them out... I have been brainwashed."

The message, to me as a man, is: it's what you do that's important, not how you look. But how do women feel? I can only imagine.

Actually, I had some insight into how women must feel the other day. I went to a beauty trade show. Women, many of whom wanted their faces to be more beautiful than they were, were looking at products and procedures that might help. You could have injections of Botox or fillers; you could have your face heated up or cut apart; you could have fat from your abdomen injected into your lips.

The “cosmetic interventions” industry is growing fast: in 2005 it was worth £720 million; five years later the figure was £2.3 billion. More than 90 per cent of the customers are women.

I watched a woman as her lips were injected with Restylane, a dermal filler designed to make faces look fuller, lips more pouty. Her face was being stretched and jabbed, stretched and jabbed. Skin was being hoicked and yanked, and then stuff was pumped into her. It looked like a cooking procedure. It looked like abuse.

Afterwards, she got up. She was shaky on her feet. She had the bearing of someone who had been in an accident. Before and after the procedure she was normal looking.

That’s one thing about cosmetic interventions, says Daniel Hamermesh, a professor at the University of Texas, who is an expert on the economics of beauty. They might help a bit. But don’t expect miracles. “Changes are likely to be small,” he says.

But women increasingly crave beauty – and for good reason. In a world that tells pretty women they are ordinary, and ordinary-looking women they are ugly, increasingly radical “solutions” come to seem normal.

In a 2013 review, the Department of Health reports that, until recently, people were discreet about cosmetic procedures; now they are “celebrated.”

These days beauty is not a bonus – it’s essential. So women, in their tens of thousands, feel a new acceptance of the pain, the fear, the microdermabrasion, the chemical peels, the intense pulsed light.

They try not to think of the procedures that go wrong, leading to more procedures. In the mirror they observe their faces with a new expertise, noting the downward slide of the malar fat pads, the atrophy of collagen. They save money. They book appointments. People yank and jab their skin. Afterwards they still look un-beautiful.

Feminists, most famously Naomi Wolf, tell us they know what’s going on. Just at the point when women were becoming more liberated – the moment when they began to act, as well as appear – the old patriarchy hit back.

In *The Beauty Myth* she makes a good case. The more power women have, she says, the more pressure there is on them to be beautiful. And passive.

“Women,” she wrote, “are mere ‘beauties’ in men’s culture so that culture can be kept male... A beautiful heroine is a contradiction in terms, since heroism is about individuality, interesting and ever changing, while ‘beauty’ is generic, boring and inert.”

In the past couple of decades scientists, who are mostly male, have stepped into the debate. And what do they tell us? The pressure on women to be beautiful is not a patriarchal backlash, because it’s been there for ever. It’s the same all over the world, whether you’re from a poor or rich country.

It’s the same in cities with glass skyscrapers as it is in tribal societies that have hardly changed since the Stone Age. That, they say, is because it’s an essential part of the human condition.

In *The Evolution of Desire*, David Buss, professor of psychology at the University of Texas, says that it all comes down to the basics of sex. Men are attracted to women who look fertile. Women are attracted to men who will make good providers. That's why men want their female partners to be a bit younger than they are. It's also why women are attracted to older men – men with a proven track record.

Throughout history, in other words, women are desirable when they look healthy and unblemished. Symmetrical features are a sign of health; a narrow waist and wide hips are a sign of fertility. Women like symmetrical features too. But they don't mind wrinkles or grey hair; in ancestral times, if a guy had grey hair, he was a proven survivor.

I've never heard any woman say anything negative about George Clooney's grey hair. And I can't imagine John Inverdale ever making a comment about Andy Murray being a normal-looking bloke.

And if, like David Buss, I'd interviewed 10,000 people in 37 different cultures, and found that, all over the world, women want men to look like strong providers, grizzled or not, I'd tell you that this was not surprising.

The writer Eva Wiseman recently identified a new journalistic genre, which she calls "first person pretty": articles by women who are, or at least feel, attractive – but whose attractiveness is a double-edged sword, attracting jealousy and spite.

"These pieces illuminate from the inside our anxiety about our bodies, our internalised misogyny," she wrote. How did we get here and why is the situation so extreme?

I recently read a debate about online porn that asked: why are female porn stars much better looking than male? Why is porn all about normal-looking blokes having sex with beautiful women?

It's because the consumers of porn are, by and large, normal-looking blokes. In other words, that's where the money is – the normal-looking blokes have it. They want to identify with the male actors, which would be more difficult if the male actors were as beautiful as the women. The male gaze leads from money to female beauty. It's brute economics.

Forty years on, for the most part men still act, women still appear. And the distinctions are becoming sharper. The ideal of male agency and female beauty goes back millennia. When, in the last century, it was challenged by feminism, it fought back. Naomi Wolf was right.

Since then, in an increasingly mediated, monetised society, the old ideal has hardened and intensified. Sponsorship and advertising endorse conservative values. The internet has brought us porn on demand, which focuses the male gaze. And porn is a hub that radiates outwards – towards fashion, music, films and novels.

As the feminist writer Ariel Levy pointed out in her book *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, lots of women seem to want to become pornographic versions of themselves, mainly because it works. It places them in the dominant culture. They felt they couldn't beat men, so they decided to join them. Some wore T-shirts with the slogan porn star.

As Levy says, "Only 30 years ago, our mothers were 'burning their bras' and picketing Playboy, and suddenly we were getting implants and getting the bunny logo as supposed symbols of our liberation."

And Catherine Hakim, senior research fellow of sociology at the LSE, might just agree.

In her book *Honey Money*, she points out that, just as men in patriarchal societies have always tried to control the way women dress, so have some feminists. “Why not champion femininity rather than abolish it? Why does no one encourage women to exploit men whenever they can?” she writes.

The other day, a man said to me, “Look, women have money these days, they have independence, they don’t want to be judged on how they look. So why don’t they turn their backs on all this va-va-voom dressing, all the make-up and high heels and beautification?”

And the answer is, I don’t know. I’m a man. I don’t live in a world of being judged on my looks. Or a world in which to look normal is to look ugly, or in which I can increase my power several notches just by how I dress.

What’s complicated for women is simple for men. Just think of John Malkovich, another normal-looking leading man. On being asked what he most disliked about his appearance, he said, “I don’t think about it. I’m a geezer. Who cares?” ■

4. *My Boss Asked Me to Straighten My Afro – So I Quit*

Magazine culture frames celebrities as trendsetters and style-makers. Dress like Zooey Deschanel! Get Jennifer Aniston's hairstyle! Buy Beyoncé's favourite mascara! But are these paragons of perfection breaking the mould, or merely pouring themselves neatly into it? One ridiculous thing about celebrity beauty tips (among many) is that they're all *exactly the same*. Not surprising, since attaining celebrity status typically demands that women adhere to a rigid set of beauty standards. It's easy to find confessional stories of female actors and models coerced into the restrictive diet or the unwanted surgical procedure, images of women Photoshopped to appear thinner or whiter. *NSFW* is discomfiting because it explores familiar territory where we all participate in a culture that perpetuates racist and misogynist norms. Each character represents a battlefield where ambition and financial imperatives are up against personal integrity and everyone's losing. We think journalist and TV personality Arisa Cox's inspiring essay about fighting back is an excellent complement to *NSFW* – a refreshing portrait of what happens when integrity wins.

Chasing polar bears. Getting tear-gassed. Interviewing Tom Cruise. Getting bled on by the winner of a global reality phenomenon during the season finale. All in a days work! After 15 years in entertainment journalism, news, radio and reality television at places like CBC's The National, E!, and ET Canada, this pop culture junkie has now found her sweet spot as host of the wildly popular TV series Big Brother Canada, on its way to season 3 on Global. Nominated this year for a Canadian Screen Award, Arisa Cox now splits her time between Toronto and her home in Edmonton with her builder husband and two insane children.

My Boss Asked Me to Straighten My Afro – So I Quit

By ARISA COX

Published August 8, 2014

[*Huffington Post*](#)

I was 24 years old. I was working at a now-defunct TV station in Ottawa and had just been promoted to entertainment/weather anchor for the evening and nightly news.

I hadn't wanted to return to the often soul-destroying intensity of daily news after a year of reality TV in Toronto. But news is where I started my career in TV, cutting my teeth reporting local news for CJOH-TV during my third year as a Journalism major at Carleton University.

And though I had been enjoying my semi-obscure job as a creative producer at a different local TV channel, I was young, and the \$17,000 raise offered to promote me back into news was hard to refuse. In the end, I had a blast. The staff was young, energetic and we got no sleep but worked really hard and made lifelong friendships doing it.

After the three-month probationary period was up, I had a customary performance review with the news executive. And the bomb dropped.

"You've worn your hair straight from time to time, we'd like you to wear it straight on the show." I could feel the heat rising in my body. Ears buzzing.

"I'm not interested," I replied without a beat. I was told the request wasn't optional "if I wanted to keep my job."

I wasn't clutching my pearls, I was seething.

I remember raging to my mother over the phone right afterwards, floored that a middle-aged white dude had the balls to tell me, a modern black woman, in a country as diverse as Canada, how to wear my hair. My stubborn streak exploded. I didn't care about corporate desires for me or my appearance. My hair – and all the identity and self-worth and cultural baggage attached to it – was not up for debate. I refused to allow my image to be controlled in some boardroom that I was not also in.

What those not in the film/TV industry often don't know is that there is a built in clause in many on-air contracts that puts control of personal appearance in the hands of the employers. But just as my managers had a contractual right to demand I change my hair, I had also had a right to find a new job. Which is the advice my wise mum gave me. She suggested I take that furious energy and put it into a job search. Canada's media industry was small, after all. Both parties would benefit from saying I was simply moving onto another opportunity. By the end of the week, I had a new job that would move me back home to Toronto that was better paid and at one of the most diverse places I've ever had the pleasure of working at. I couldn't have planned it better myself.

But I'm one of the lucky ones. Requests to wear processed hair for on-camera work is more common than you think – and not everyone is able to walk away from a job so easily. Sometimes the work is so great a journalist or performer must swallow their pride and surrender, no matter how irritating it may be. And it's definitely not exclusive to black women.

The pressure for on-air types to go blond is well documented, and long hair is even better, since short hair tests poorly, or so the conventional wisdom goes. Remember when Keri Russell chopped off her signature curly mane during the *Felicity* years? Outrage! Ratings free fall! Chaos! And applause from me.

Like the vast majority of women, I can track my life story through my hair. Every different hair style or colour is a milestone that we can recall with ease – the significance being not so much the hairstyle, but how it made us feel. But for black women, our personal hair journeys have an additional layer of complication. Our hair is farthest from the European standard of beauty that you can get.

Until the Black is Beautiful movement of the 1960s when afros began to appear in earnest as a symbol of pride, every black woman's rite of passage was getting a perm. For those in the dark – that means using a highly toxic compound to chemically straighten kinky hair. You would still have to endure an hour of blow-drying and hot iron action after washing it, and be allergic to rain and swimming pools, but that's the tradeoff. As a teenager, I tried it too. The goal is "good hair" – hair that moves, that shifts in the wind. To have natural or nappy hair meant looking like a slave.

Luckily, my Trinidadian-born parents – my mother with "good hair" and my father with long dreadlocks – had both worn afros in their pasts. They had long fostered my confidence in my smarts over my appearance, which was lucky, because my ugly duckling years were not kind. But being an outsider builds character. You learn to see not fitting in as standing out. And it frees you from traditional rules, especially those of the bajillion-dollar beauty industry. So I've tried it all. Braids until I was 16. Long and straight at 18. The afro came in at 22. At 25 it was short and mostly blond, at 31 the afro was much bigger and back to black to match my daughter.

By 2014, natural hair had made a massive comeback. Now there is an alternative theory that women who feel forced to wear long straight weaves are the slaves now to an ideal of beauty it is impossible for us to naturally attain. The head nod that we afroed women and men shared

15 years ago as strangers hardly exists now, in Toronto anyway, since there are so many of us. And we are all grateful for Angela Davis and Diana Ross and Pam Grier – the famous afros that came long before us.

Working on *Big Brother Canada* has been a bit of a big deal for the natural hair scene as well. With so many international fans of our show, I have heard more than once that my hairstyle has been inspirational for many women and their daughters – struggling to fight the tide of weaved-out pop stars and celebrities. It's humbling.

But reality exists in the grey areas. There's Beyoncé, but there's also Lauryn Hill. Not all black women who wear straight hair are self-hating, just as not all black women who wear natural hair like afros, twists and dreadlocks have transcended vanity. Any woman should feel the freedom to wear whatever hair makes her feel good. It takes all kinds, and self-esteem as it relates to our hair comes in many forms. Most women are on a never-ending quest to find the hair that perfectly expresses who they are at that moment in time. We live in a visual, often superficial world, and we can't see personality from across the room. But we can see hair.

I will never forget that breakthrough moment when my fabulous hair stylist Romeo Lewis said: "You know if you layer your hair, you can probably wear it curly all the time." Sweeter words were never spoken. I have never looked back, and my hair remained a positive for the rest of my career in television. People want to touch it, people want to understand it, people ask me questions about it on Twitter. It's simple for me – I rock this hair because it's low maintenance, because it's a nod to my ancestors, because it's hard to forget, because it feels like a celebration, like who I am on the inside showing up on the outside.

It's all a matter of perspective. I am not a size two, I don't have big boobs and I don't have long hair that blows in the wind. But I do have a wicked sense of humour, curiosity for days, a big laugh and BIG HAIR. So I didn't lose my job. I won a sense of self-respect. I love a happy ending. ■

5. *Men Explain Things to Me*

Often credited for introducing the phrase “mansplain” into the colloquial lexicon, Rebecca Solnit’s landmark 2008 essay is a brilliant, eye-opening account of the myriad ways women are silenced in our culture – from the most subtle remark to the most horrific of violent acts. Her provocative writing calls attention to the gendered nature of violence in our culture.

This essay appears in Rebecca Solnit’s book *Men Explain Things to Me*, published by Dispatch Books, Haymarket Books, 2014. **To purchase this exceptional resource visit your local bookstore or [amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca).**

Rebecca Solnit is an award-winning writer, historian and activist. Men Explain Things to Me is her latest of 16 published books about environment, landscape, community, art, politics, hope and memory. A product of the California public education system from kindergarten to graduate school, she is a contributing editor to Harper’s and a frequent contributor to the political site [TomDispatch.com](https://www.tomdispatch.com).

Men Explain Things to Me

By REBECCA SOLNIT

Originally published in 2008

[TomDispatch.com](https://www.tomdispatch.com)

I still don’t know why Sallie and I bothered to go to that party in the forest slope above Aspen. The people were all older than us and dull in a distinguished way, old enough that we, at forty-ish, passed as the occasion’s young ladies. The house was great – if you like Ralph Lauren-style chalets – a rugged luxury cabin at 9,000 feet complete with elk antlers, lots of kilims, and a wood-burning stove. We were preparing to leave when our host said, “No, stay a little longer so I can talk to you.” He was an imposing man who’d made a lot of money.

He kept us waiting while the other guests drifted out into the summer night, and then sat us down at his authentically grainy wood table and said to me, “So? I hear you’ve written a couple of books.”

I replied, “Several, actually.”

He said, in the way you encourage your friend’s seven-year-old to describe flute practice, “And what are they about?”

They were actually about quite a few different things, the six or seven out by then, but I began to speak only of the most recent on that summer day in 2003, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*, my book on the annihilation of time and space and the industrialization of everyday life.

He cut me off soon after I mentioned Muybridge. “And have you heard about the *very important* Muybridge book that came out this year?”

So caught up was I in my assigned role as ingénue that I was perfectly willing to entertain the possibility that another book on the same subject had come out simultaneously and I’d somehow missed it. He was already telling me about the very important book – with that smug look I know so well in a man holding forth, eyes fixed on the fuzzy far horizon of his own authority.

Here, let me just say that my life is well-sprinkled with lovely men, with a long succession of editors who have, since I was young, listened and encouraged and published me, with my infinitely generous younger brother, with splendid friends of whom it could be said – like the Clerk in *The Canterbury Tales* I still remember from Mr. Pelen’s class on Chaucer – “gladly would he learn and gladly teach.” Still, there are these other men, too. So, Mr. Very Important was going on smugly about this book I should have known when Sallie interrupted him to say, “That’s her book.” Or tried to interrupt him anyway.

But he just continued on his way. She had to say, “That’s her book” three or four times before he finally took it in. And then, as if in a nineteenth-century novel, he went ashen. That I was indeed the author of the very important book it turned out he hadn’t read, just read about in the *New York Times Book Review* a few months earlier, so confused the neat categories into which his world was sorted that he was stunned speechless – for a moment, before he began holding forth again. Being women, we were politely out of earshot before we started laughing, and we’ve never really stopped.

I like incidents of that sort, when forces that are usually so sneaky and hard to point out slither out of the grass and are as obvious as, say, an anaconda that’s eaten a cow or an elephant turd on the carpet.

When *River of Shadows* came out, some pedant wrote a snarky letter to the *New York Times* explaining that, though Muybridge had made improvements in camera technology, he had not made any breakthroughs in photographic chemistry. The guy had no idea what he was talking about. Both Philip Prodger, in his wonderful book on Muybridge, and I had actually researched the subject and made it clear that Muybridge had done something obscure but powerful to the wet-plate technology of the time to speed it up amazingly, but letters to the editor don’t get fact-checked. And perhaps because the book was about the virile subjects of cinema and technology, the Men Who Knew came out of the woodwork.

A British academic wrote in to the *London Review of Books* with all kinds of nitpicking corrections and complaints, all of them from outer space. He carped, for example, that to aggrandize Muybridge’s standing I left out technological predecessors like Henry R. Heyl. He’d apparently not read the book all the way to page 202 or checked the index, since Heyl was there (though his contribution was just not very significant). Surely one of these men has died of embarrassment, but not nearly publicly enough.

The Slippery Slope of Silencings

Yes, guys like this pick on other men’s books too, and people of both genders pop up at events to hold forth on irrelevant things and conspiracy theories, but the out-and-out confrontational confidence of the totally ignorant is, in my experience, gendered. Men explain things to me, and other women, whether or not they know what they’re talking about. Some men.

Every woman knows what I’m talking about. It’s the presumption that makes it hard, at times, for any woman in any field; that keeps women from speaking up and from being heard when they dare; that crushes young women into silence by indicating, the way harassment on the street does, that this is not their world. It trains us in self-doubt and self-limitation just as it exercises men’s unsupported overconfidence.

I wouldn’t be surprised if part of the trajectory of American politics since 2001 was shaped by, say, the inability to hear Coleen Rowley, the FBI woman who issued those early warnings about al-Qaeda, and it was certainly shaped by a Bush administration to which you couldn’t tell anything, including that Iraq had no links to al-Qaeda and no WMDs, or that the war was not going to be a “cakewalk.” (Even male experts couldn’t penetrate the fortress of their smugness.)

Arrogance might have had something to do with the war, but this syndrome is a war that nearly every woman faces every day, a war within herself too, a belief in her superfluity, an invitation to silence, one from which a fairly nice career as a writer (with a lot of research and facts correctly deployed) has not entirely freed me. After all, there was a moment there when I was willing to let Mr. Important and his overweening confidence bowl over my more shaky certainty.

Don't forget that I've had a lot more confirmation of my right to think and speak than most women, and I've learned that a certain amount of self-doubt is a good tool for correcting, understanding, listening, and progressing – though too much is paralyzing and total self-confidence produces arrogant idiots, like the ones who have governed us since 2001. There's a happy medium between these poles to which the genders have been pushed, a warm equatorial belt of give and take where we should all meet.

More extreme versions of our situation exist in, for example, those Middle Eastern countries where women's testimony has no legal standing; so that a woman can't testify that she was raped without a male witness to counter the male rapist. Which there rarely is.

Credibility is a basic survival tool. When I was very young and just beginning to get what feminism was about and why it was necessary, I had a boyfriend whose uncle was a nuclear physicist. One Christmas, he was telling – as though it were a light and amusing subject – how a neighbor's wife in his suburban bomb-making community had come running out of her house naked in the middle of the night screaming that her husband was trying to kill her. How, I asked, did you know that he wasn't trying to kill her? He explained, patiently, that they were respectable middle-class people. Therefore, her-husband-trying-to-kill-her was simply not a credible explanation for her fleeing the house yelling that her husband was trying to kill her. That she was crazy, on the other hand....

Even getting a restraining order – a fairly new legal tool – requires acquiring the credibility to convince the courts that some guy is a menace and then getting the cops to enforce it. Restraining orders often don't work anyway. Violence is one way to silence people, to deny their voice and their credibility, to assert your right to control over their right to exist. About three women a day are murdered by spouses or ex-spouses in this country. It's one of the main causes of death in pregnant women in the U.S. At the heart of the struggle of feminism to give rape, date rape, marital rape, domestic violence, and workplace sexual harassment legal standing as crimes has been the necessity of making women credible and audible.

I tend to believe that women acquired the status of human beings when these kinds of acts started to be taken seriously, when the big things that stop us and kill us were addressed legally from the mid-1970s on; well after, that is, my birth. And for anyone about to argue that workplace sexual intimidation isn't a life or death issue, remember that Marine Lance Corporal Maria Lauterbach, age 20, was apparently killed by her higher-ranking colleague last winter while she was waiting to testify that he raped her. The burned remains of her pregnant body were found in the fire pit in his backyard in December.

Being told that, categorically, he knows what he's talking about and she doesn't, however minor a part of any given conversation, perpetuates the ugliness of this world and holds back its light. After my book *Wanderlust* came out in 2000, I found myself better able to resist being bullied out of my own perceptions and interpretations. On two occasions around that time, I objected to the behavior of a man, only to be told that the incidents hadn't happened at all as I said, that I was subjective, delusional, overwrought, dishonest – in a nutshell, female.

Most of my life, I would have doubted myself and backed down. Having public standing as a writer of history helped me stand my ground, but few women get that boost, and billions of

women must be out there on this six-billion-person planet being told that they are not reliable witnesses to their own lives, that the truth is not their property, now or ever. This goes way beyond Men Explaining Things, but it's part of the same archipelago of arrogance.

Men explain things to me, still. And no man has ever apologized for explaining, wrongly, things that I know and they don't. Not yet, but according to the actuarial tables, I may have another forty-something years to live, more or less, so it could happen. Though I'm not holding my breath.

Women Fighting on Two Fronts

A few years after the idiot in Aspen, I was in Berlin giving a talk when the Marxist writer Tariq Ali invited me out to a dinner that included a male writer and translator and three women a little younger than me who would remain deferential and mostly silent throughout the dinner. Tariq was great. Perhaps the translator was peeved that I insisted on playing a modest role in the conversation, but when I said something about how Women Strike for Peace, the extraordinary, little-known antinuclear and antiwar group founded in 1961, helped bring down the communist-hunting House Committee on Un-American Activities, HUAC, Mr. Very Important II sneered at me. HUAC, he insisted, didn't exist by the early 1960s and, anyway, no women's group played such a role in HUAC's downfall. His scorn was so withering, his confidence so aggressive, that arguing with him seemed a scary exercise in futility and an invitation to more insult.

I think I was at nine books at that point, including one that drew from primary documents and interviews about Women Strike for Peace. But explaining men still assume I am, in some sort of obscene impregnation metaphor, an empty vessel to be filled with their wisdom and knowledge. A Freudian would claim to know what they have and I lack, but intelligence is not situated in the crotch – even if you can write one of Virginia Woolf's long mellifluous musical sentences about the subtle subjugation of women in the snow with your willie. Back in my hotel room, I Googled a bit and found that Eric Bentley in his definitive history of the House Committee on Un-American Activities credits Women Strike for Peace with "striking the crucial blow in the fall of HUAC's Bastille." In the early 1960s.

So I opened an essay for the *Nation* with this interchange, in part as a shout-out to one of the more unpleasant men who have explained things to me: Dude, if you're reading this, you're a carbuncle on the face of humanity and an obstacle to civilization. Feel the shame.

The battle with Men Who Explain Things has trampled down many women – of my generation, of the up-and-coming generation we need so badly, here and in Pakistan and Bolivia and Java, not to speak of the countless women who came before me and were not allowed into the laboratory, or the library, or the conversation, or the revolution, or even the category called human.

After all, Women Strike for Peace was founded by women who were tired of making the coffee and doing the typing and not having any voice or decision-making role in the antinuclear movement of the 1950s. Most women fight wars on two fronts, one for whatever the putative topic is and one simply for the right to speak, to have ideas, to be acknowledged to be in possession of facts and truths, to have value, to be a human being. Things have certainly gotten better, but this war won't end in my lifetime. I'm still fighting it, for myself certainly, but also for all those younger women who have something to say, in the hope that they will get to say it. ■

6. *The Longest War*

In this provocative and powerful essay about the gendered nature of violence in our culture, Rebecca Solnit writes, “We have an abundance of rape and violence against women in this country and on this Earth, though it’s almost never treated as a civil rights or human rights issue, or a crisis, or even a pattern.” This essay is a call to action. To recognize that in our world, violence has a gender. To identify, “What we don’t talk about when we don’t talk about gender.” To ignite the conversation.

The following essay appears in Rebecca Solnit’s book *Men Explain Things to Me*, published by Dispatch Books, Haymarket Books, 2014. **To purchase this exceptional resource visit your local bookstore or [amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca).**

Rebecca Solnit is an award-winning writer, historian and activist. Men Explain Things to Me is her latest of 16 published books about environment, landscape, community, art, politics, hope and memory. A product of the California public education system from kindergarten to graduate school, she is a contributing editor to Harper’s and a frequent contributor to the political site [TomDispatch.com](https://www.tomdispatch.com).

The Longest War – A Rape a Minute, a Thousand Corpses a Year: Hate Crimes in America (and Elsewhere)

By REBECCA SOLNIT

Originally published 2013

[TomDispatch.com](https://www.tomdispatch.com)

Here in the United States, where there is a reported rape every 6.2 minutes, and one in five women will be raped in her lifetime, the rape and gruesome murder of a young woman on a bus in New Delhi on December 16th was treated as an exceptional incident. The story of the alleged rape of an unconscious teenager by members of the Steubenville High School football team was still unfolding, and gang rapes aren’t that unusual here either. Take your pick: some of the 20 men who gang-raped an 11-year-old in Cleveland, Texas, were sentenced in November, while the instigator of the gang rape of a 16-year-old in Richmond, California, was sentenced in October, and four men who gang-raped a 15-year-old near New Orleans were sentenced in April, though the six men who gang-raped a 14-year-old in Chicago last fall are still at large. Not that I actually went out looking for incidents: they’re everywhere in the news, though no one adds them up and indicates that there might actually be a pattern.

There is, however, a pattern of violence against women that’s broad and deep and horrific and incessantly overlooked. Occasionally, a case involving a celebrity or lurid details in a particular case get a lot of attention in the media, but such cases are treated as anomalies, while the abundance of incidental news items about violence against women in this country, in other countries, on every continent including Antarctica, constitute a kind of background wallpaper for the news.

If you’d rather talk about bus rapes than gang rapes, there’s the rape of a developmentally disabled woman on a Los Angeles bus in November and the kidnapping of an autistic 16-year-old on the regional transit train system in Oakland, California – she was raped repeatedly by her abductor over two days this winter – and there was a gang rape of multiple women on a bus in Mexico City recently, too. While I was writing this, I read that another female bus-rider was kidnapped in India and gang-raped all night by the bus driver and five of his friends who must have thought what happened in New Delhi was awesome.

We have an abundance of rape and violence against women in this country and on this Earth, though it's almost never treated as a civil rights or human rights issue, or a crisis, or even a pattern. Violence doesn't have a race, a class, a religion, or a nationality, but it does have a gender.

Here I want to say one thing: though virtually all the perpetrators of such crimes are men, that doesn't mean all men are violent. Most are not. In addition, men obviously also suffer violence, largely at the hands of other men, and every violent death, every assault is terrible. But the subject here is the pandemic of violence by men against women, both intimate violence and stranger violence.

What We Don't Talk About When We Don't Talk About Gender

There's so much of it. We could talk about the assault and rape of a 73-year-old in Manhattan's Central Park last September, or the recent rape of a four-year-old and an 83-year-old in Louisiana, or the New York City policeman who was arrested in October for what appeared to be serious plans to kidnap, rape, cook, and eat a woman, any woman, because the hate wasn't personal (though maybe it was for the San Diego man who actually killed and cooked his wife in November and the man from New Orleans who killed, dismembered, and cooked his girlfriend in 2005).

Those are all exceptional crimes, but we could also talk about quotidian assaults, because though a rape is reported only every 6.2 minutes in this country, the estimated total is perhaps five times as high. Which means that there may be very nearly a rape a minute in the U.S. It all adds up to tens of millions of rape victims.

We could talk about high-school and college-athlete rapes, or campus rapes, to which university authorities have been appallingly uninterested in responding in many cases, including that high school in Steubenville, Notre Dame University, Amherst College and many others. We could talk about the escalating pandemic of rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment in the U.S. military, where Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta estimated that there were 19,000 sexual assaults on fellow soldiers in 2010 alone and that the great majority of assailants got away with it, though four-star general Jeffrey Sinclair was indicted in September for "a slew of sex crimes against women."

Never mind workplace violence, let's go home. So many men murder their partners and former partners that we have well over 1,000 homicides of that kind a year – meaning that every three years the death toll tops 9/11's casualties, though no one declares a war on this particular terror. (Another way to put it: the more than 11,766 corpses from domestic-violence homicides since 9/11 exceed the number of deaths of victims on that day *and* all American soldiers killed in the "war on terror.") If we talked about crimes like these and why they are so common, we'd have to talk about what kinds of profound change this society, or this nation, or nearly every nation needs. If we talked about it, we'd be talking about masculinity, or male roles, or maybe patriarchy, and we don't talk much about that.

Instead, we hear that American men commit murder-suicides – at the rate of about 12 a week – because the economy is bad, though they also do it when the economy is good; or that those men in India murdered the bus-rider because the poor resent the rich, while other rapes in India are explained by how the rich exploit the poor; and then there are those ever-popular explanations: mental problems and intoxicants – and for jocks, head injuries. The latest spin is that lead exposure was responsible for a lot of our violence, except that both genders are exposed and one commits most of the violence. The pandemic of violence always gets

explained as anything but gender, anything but what would seem to be the broadest explanatory pattern of all.

Someone wrote a piece about how white men seem to be the ones who commit mass murders in the U.S. and the (mostly hostile) commenters only seemed to notice the white part. It's rare that anyone says what this medical study does, even if in the driest way possible: "Being male has been identified as a risk factor for violent criminal behavior in several studies, as have exposure to tobacco smoke before birth, having antisocial parents, and belonging to a poor family."

Still, the pattern is plain as day. We could talk about this as a global problem, looking at the epidemic of assault, harassment, and rape of women in Cairo's Tahrir Square that has taken away the freedom they celebrated during the Arab Spring – and led some men there to form defense teams to help counter it – or the persecution of women in public and private in India from "Eve-teasing" to bride-burning, or "honor killings" in South Asia and the Middle East, or the way that South Africa has become a global rape capital, with an estimated 600,000 rapes last year, or how rape has been used as a tactic and "weapon" of war in Mali, Sudan, and the Congo, as it was in the former Yugoslavia, or the pervasiveness of rape and harassment in Mexico and the femicide in Juarez, or the denial of basic rights for women in Saudi Arabia and the myriad sexual assaults on immigrant domestic workers there, or the way that the Dominique Strauss-Kahn case in the United States revealed what impunity he and others had in France, and it's only for lack of space I'm leaving out Britain and Canada and Italy (with its ex-prime minister known for his orgies with the underaged), Argentina and Australia and so many other countries.

Who Has the Right to Kill You?

But maybe you're tired of statistics, so let's just talk about a single incident that happened in my city a couple of weeks ago, one of many local incidents in which men assaulted women that made the local papers this month:

"A woman was stabbed after she rebuffed a man's sexual advances while she walked in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood late Monday night, a police spokesman said today. The 33-year-old victim was walking down the street when a stranger approached her and propositioned her, police spokesman Officer Albie Esparza said. When she rejected him, the man became very upset and slashed the victim in the face and stabbed her in the arm, Esparza said."

The man, in other words, framed the situation as one in which his chosen victim had no rights and liberties, while he had the right to control and punish her. This should remind us that violence is first of all authoritarian. It begins with this premise: I have the right to control you.

Murder is the extreme version of that authoritarianism, where the murderer asserts he has the right to decide whether you live or die, the ultimate means of controlling someone. This may be true even if you are "obedient," because the desire to control comes out of a rage that obedience can't assuage. Whatever fears, whatever sense of vulnerability may underlie such behavior, it also comes out of entitlement, the entitlement to inflict suffering and even death on other people. It breeds misery in the perpetrator and the victims.

As for that incident in my city, similar things happen all the time. Many versions of it happened to me when I was younger, sometimes involving death threats and often involving torrents of obscenities: a man approaches a woman with both desire and the furious expectation that the desire will likely be rebuffed. The fury and desire come in a package, all twisted together into something that always threatens to turn *eros* into *thanatos*, love into death, sometimes literally.

It's a system of control. It's why so many intimate-partner murders are of women who dared to break up with those partners. As a result, it imprisons a lot of women, and though you could say that the attacker on January 7th, or a brutal would-be-rapist near my own neighborhood on January 5th, or another rapist here on January 12th, or the San Franciscan who on January 6th set his girlfriend on fire for refusing to do his laundry, or the guy who was just sentenced to 370 years for some particularly violent rapes in San Francisco in late 2011, were marginal characters, rich, famous, and privileged guys do it, too.

The Japanese vice-consul in San Francisco was charged with 12 felony counts of spousal abuse and assault with a deadly weapon last September, the same month that, in the same town, the ex-girlfriend of Mason Mayer (brother of Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer) testified in court: "He ripped out my earrings, tore my eyelashes off, while spitting in my face and telling me how unlovable I am... I was on the ground in the fetal position, and when I tried to move, he squeezed both knees tighter into my sides to restrain me and slapped me." According to the newspaper, she also testified that "Mayer slammed her head onto the floor repeatedly and pulled out clumps of her hair, telling her that the only way she was leaving the apartment alive was if he drove her to the Golden Gate Bridge 'where you can jump off or I will push you off.'" Mason Mayer got probation.

This summer, an estranged husband violated his wife's restraining order against him, shooting her – and six other women – at her spa job in suburban Milwaukee, but since there were only four corpses the crime was largely overlooked in the media in a year with so many more spectacular mass murders in this country (and we still haven't really talked about the fact that, of 62 mass shootings in the U.S. in three decades, only one was by a woman, because when you say *lone gunman*, everyone talks about loners and guns but not about men – and by the way, nearly two thirds of all women killed by guns are killed by their partner or ex-partner).

What's love got to do with it, asked Tina Turner, whose ex-husband Ike once said, "Yeah I hit her, but I didn't hit her more than the average guy beats his wife." A woman is beaten every nine seconds in this country. Just to be clear: not nine minutes, but nine seconds. It's the number-one cause of injury to American women; of the two million injured annually, more than half a million of those injuries require medical attention while about 145,000 require overnight hospitalizations, according to the Center for Disease Control, and you don't want to know about the dentistry needed afterwards. Spouses are also the leading cause of death for pregnant women in the U.S.

"Women worldwide ages 15 through 44 are more likely to die or be maimed because of male violence than because of cancer, malaria, war and traffic accidents combined," writes Nicholas D. Kristof, one of the few prominent figures to address the issue regularly.

The Chasm Between Our Worlds

Rape and other acts of violence, up to and including murder, as well as threats of violence, constitute the barrage some men lay down as they attempt to control some women, and fear of that violence limits most women in ways they've gotten so used to they hardly notice – and we hardly address. There are exceptions: last summer someone wrote to me to describe a college class in which the students were asked what they do to stay safe from rape. The young women described the intricate ways they stayed alert, limited their access to the world, took precautions, and essentially thought about rape all the time (while the young men in the class, he added, gaped in astonishment). The chasm between their worlds had briefly and suddenly become visible.

Mostly, however, we don't talk about it – though a graphic has been circulating on the Internet called *Ten Top Tips to End Rape*, the kind of thing young women get often enough, but this one had a subversive twist. It offered advice like this: "Carry a whistle! If you are worried you might assault someone 'by accident' you can hand it to the person you are with, so they can call for help." While funny, the piece points out something terrible: the usual guidelines in such situations put the full burden of prevention on potential victims, treating the violence as a given. You explain to me why colleges spend more time telling women how to survive predators than telling the other half of their students not to be predators.

Threats of sexual assault now seem to take place online regularly. In late 2011, British columnist Laurie Penny wrote, "An opinion, it seems, is the short skirt of the Internet. Having one and flaunting it is somehow asking an amorphous mass of almost-entirely male keyboard-bashers to tell you how they'd like to rape, kill, and urinate on you. This week, after a particularly ugly slew of threats, I decided to make just a few of those messages public on Twitter, and the response I received was overwhelming. Many could not believe the hate I received, and many more began to share their own stories of harassment, intimidation, and abuse."

Women in the online gaming community have been harassed, threatened, and driven out. Anita Sarkeesian, a feminist media critic who documented such incidents, received support for her work, but also, in the words of a journalist, "another wave of really aggressive, you know, violent personal threats, her accounts attempted to be hacked. And one man in Ontario took the step of making an online video game where you could punch Anita's image on the screen. And if you punched it multiple times, bruises and cuts would appear on her image." The difference between these online gamers and the Taliban men who, last October, tried to murder 14-year-old Malala Yousafzai for speaking out about the right of Pakistani women to education is one of degree. Both are trying to silence and punish women for claiming voice, power, and the right to participate. Welcome to Manistan.

The Party for the Protection of the Rights of Rapists

It's not just public, or private, or online either. It's also embedded in our political system, and our legal system, which before feminists fought for us didn't recognize most domestic violence, or sexual harassment and stalking, or date rape, or acquaintance rape, or marital rape, and in cases of rape still often tries the victim rather than the rapist, as though only perfect maidens could be assaulted – or believed.

As we learned in the 2012 election campaign, it's also embedded in the minds and mouths of our politicians. Remember that spate of crazy pro-rape things Republican men said last summer and fall, starting with Todd Akin's notorious claim that a woman has ways of preventing pregnancy in cases of rape, a statement he made in order to deny women control over their own bodies. After that, of course, Senate candidate Richard Mourdock claimed that rape pregnancies were "a gift from God," and just this month, another Republican politician piped up to defend Akin's comment.

Happily the five publicly pro-rape Republicans in the 2012 campaign all lost their election bids. (Stephen Colbert tried to warn them that women had gotten the vote in 1920.) But it's not just a matter of the garbage they say (and the price they now pay). Earlier this month, congressional Republicans refused to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, because they objected to the protection it gave immigrants, transgendered women, and Native American women. (Speaking of epidemics, one of three Native American women will be raped, and on the reservations 88% of those rapes are by non-Native men who know tribal governments can't prosecute them.)

And they're out to gut reproductive rights – birth control as well as abortion, as they've pretty effectively done in many states over the last dozen years. What's meant by "reproductive rights," of course, is the right of women to control their own bodies. Didn't I mention earlier that violence against women is a control issue?

And though rapes are often investigated lackadaisically – there is a backlog of about 400,000 untested rape kits in this country– rapists who impregnate their victims have parental rights in 31 states. Oh, and former vice-presidential candidate and current congressman Paul Ryan (R-Manistan) is reintroducing a bill that would give states the right to ban abortions and might even conceivably allow a rapist to sue his victim for having one.

All the Things That Aren't to Blame

Of course, women are capable of all sorts of major unpleasantness, and there are violent crimes by women, but the so-called war of the sexes is extraordinarily lopsided when it comes to actual violence. Unlike the last (male) head of the International Monetary Fund, the current (female) head is not going to assault an employee at a luxury hotel; top-ranking female officers in the U.S. military, unlike their male counterparts, are not accused of any sexual assaults; and young female athletes, unlike those male football players in Steubenville, aren't likely to urinate on unconscious boys, let alone violate them and boast about it in YouTube videos and Twitter feeds.

No female bus riders in India have ganged up to sexually assault a man so badly he dies of his injuries, nor are marauding packs of women terrorizing men in Cairo's Tahrir Square, and there's just no maternal equivalent to the 11% of rapes that are by fathers or stepfathers. Of the people in prison in the U.S., 93.5% are not women, and though quite a lot of them should not be there in the first place, maybe some of them should because of violence, until we think of a better way to deal with it, and them.

No major female pop star has blown the head off a young man she took home with her, as did Phil Spector. (He is now part of that 93.5% for the shotgun slaying of Lana Clarkson, apparently for refusing his advances.) No female action-movie star has been charged with domestic violence, because Angelina Jolie just isn't doing what Mel Gibson and Steve McQueen did, and there aren't any celebrated female movie directors who gave a 13-year-old drugs before sexually assaulting that child, while she kept saying "no," as did Roman Polanski.

In Memory of Jyoti Singh

What's the matter with manhood? There's something about how masculinity is imagined, about what's praised and encouraged, about the way violence is passed on to boys that needs to be addressed. There are lovely and wonderful men out there, and one of the things that's encouraging in this round of the war against women is how many men I've seen who get it, who think it's their issue too, who stand up for us and with us in everyday life, online and in the marches from New Delhi to San Francisco this winter.

Increasingly men are becoming good allies – and there always have been some. Kindness and gentleness never had a gender, and neither did empathy. Domestic violence statistics are down significantly from earlier decades (even though they're still shockingly high), and a lot of men are at work crafting new ideas and ideals about masculinity and power.

Gay men have been good allies of mine for almost four decades. (Apparently same-sex marriage horrifies conservatives because it's marriage between equals with no inevitable roles.) Women's liberation has often been portrayed as a movement intent on encroaching upon or

taking power and privilege away from men, as though in some dismal zero-sum game, only one gender at a time could be free and powerful. But we are free together or slaves together.

There are other things I'd rather write about, but this affects everything else. The lives of half of humanity are still dogged by, drained by, and sometimes ended by this pervasive variety of violence. Think of how much more time and energy we would have to focus on other things that matter if we weren't so busy surviving. Look at it this way: one of the best journalists I know is afraid to walk home at night in our neighborhood. Should she stop working late? How many women have had to stop doing their work, or been stopped from doing it, for similar reasons?

One of the most exciting new political movements on Earth is the Native Canadian indigenous rights movement, with feminist and environmental overtones, called Idle No More. On December 27th, shortly after the movement took off, a Native woman was kidnapped, raped, beaten, and left for dead in Thunder Bay, Ontario, by men whose remarks framed the crime as retaliation against Idle No More. Afterward, she walked four hours through the bitter cold and survived to tell her tale. Her assailants, who have threatened to do it again, are still at large.

The New Delhi rape and murder of Jyoti Singh, the 23-year-old who was studying physiotherapy so that she could better herself while helping others, and the assault on her male companion (who survived) seem to have triggered the reaction that we have needed for 100, or 1,000, or 5,000 years. May she be to women – and men – worldwide what Emmett Till, murdered by white supremacists in 1955, was to African-Americans and the then-nascent U.S. civil rights movement.

We have far more than 87,000 rapes in this country every year, but each of them is invariably portrayed as an isolated incident. We have dots so close they're splatters melting into a stain, but hardly anyone connects them, or names that stain. In India they did. They said that this is a civil rights issue, it's a human rights issue, it's everyone's problem, it's not isolated, and it's never going to be acceptable again. It has to change. It's your job to change it, and mine, and ours.

Rebecca Solnit has written a version of this essay three times so far, once in the 1980s for the punk magazine Maximum Rock'n'Roll, once as the chapter on women and walking in her 2000 book Wanderlust: A History of Walking, and last year for TomDispatch.com, published in Men Explain Things to Me, 2014. She would love the topic to become out of date and irrelevant and never to have write it again. ■

I. Recommended Resources

Documentaries

Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women

Jean Kilbourne's impactful film is an accessible yet poignant critical analysis of the media's objectification of women and the perpetuation of damaging and oppressive beauty standards.

View this brilliant 45-minute documentary for free online: dailymotion.com/video/x1n3d88_killing-us-softly-4_news.

Learn more about Jean Kilbourne and her work at jeankilbourne.com.

Miss Representation

This very accessible film by Jennifer Siebel Newsom, looks at the ways in which women are represented in the media. Drawing on the work and experiences of Jean Kilbourne and others, Newsom reflects upon the broad implications of media representations of girls and women, with a focus on the impact on women's participation in American government. To purchase a copy and learn more about The Representation Project and their many wonderful resources for students and teachers, visit therepresentationproject.org.

Books

Men Explain Thing to Me. Rebecca Solnit, 2014, Chicago, Illinois, Dispatch Books, Haymarket Books.

Satire and Dissent. Amber Day, 2011, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press.

The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women. Naomi Wolf, 1991, New York, New York, Harper Collins.

Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women. Susan Faludi, 1991, New York, New York, Random House.

Websites for Further Reading, Exploration and Discovery

Rebecca Solnit: rebeccasolnit.net

Tom Dispatch: TomDispatch.com

Jessica Ledwich: jessicaledwich.com/the-ferocious1.html

P.S. You're Beautiful: psyoubereautiful.ca

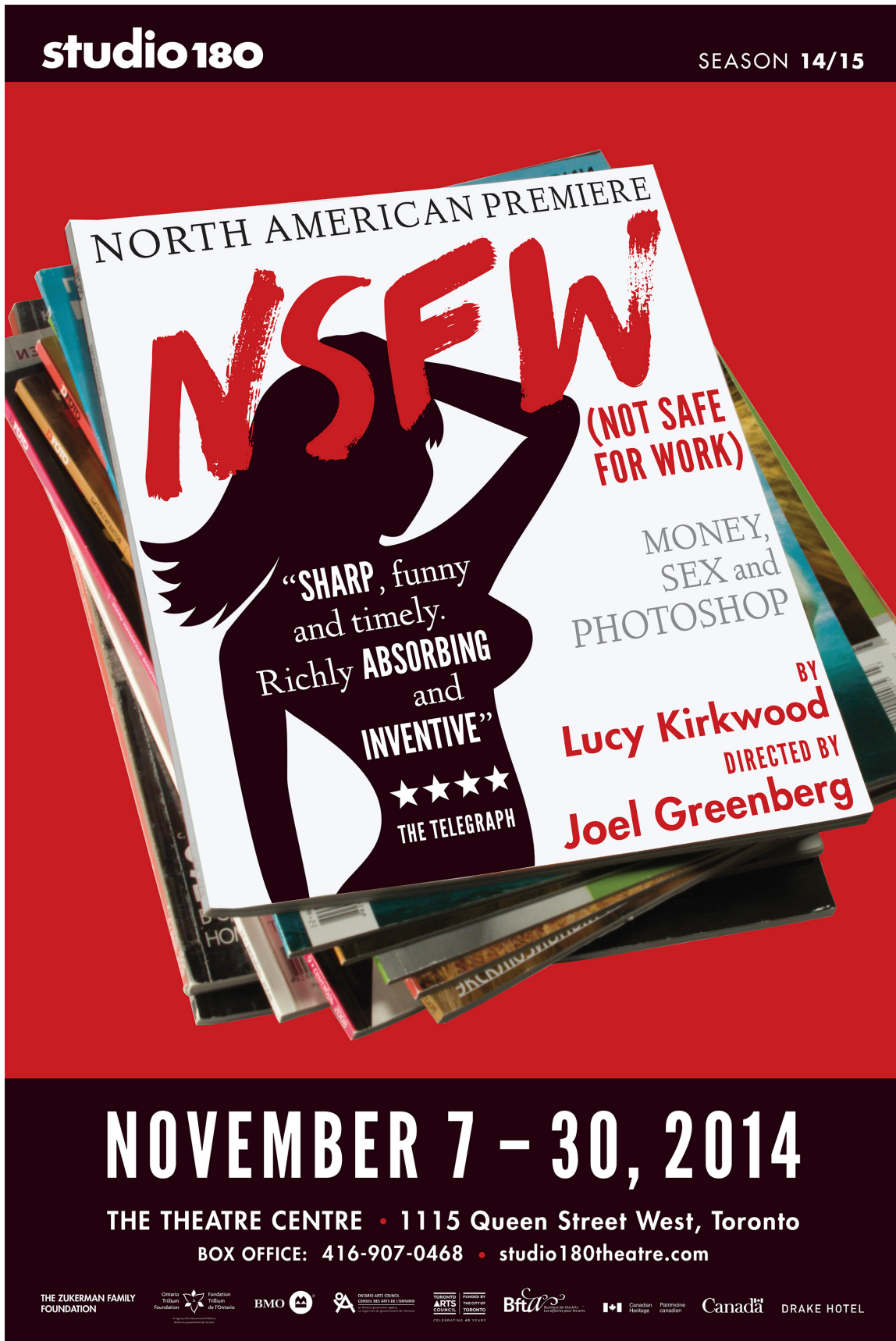
Flare and Fade: flareandfade.com

Shameless Magazine: shamelessmag.com

Center for Young Women's Health: youngwomenshealth.org

Appendix A: Poster Art for NSFW



studio180 SEASON 14/15



The poster features a stack of books with a white cover prominently displayed. The cover has the title "NSFW" in large, red, hand-painted letters. Below the title is a black silhouette of a person with long hair, arms raised, and a large white heart shape on their chest. Text on the cover includes "NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE" at the top, "(NOT SAFE FOR WORK)" to the right of the silhouette, and a quote from The Telegraph: "SHARP, funny and timely. Richly ABSORBING and INVENTIVE" with four stars. To the right of the silhouette, it says "MONEY, SEX and PHOTOSHOP" and "BY Lucy Kirkwood DIRECTED BY Joel Greenberg".

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