Images of Delinquent Girls: Gender Stereotyping in Canadian News Representations, 1900–1979

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Abstract

This article presents a thematic analysis of gender in Canadian print media portrayals of female delinquency, 1900-1979. Girls' wrongdoing has historically been treated as unnatural and requiring further explanation. The main thrust of media representations of delinquent girls centres on these girls' (perceived) promiscuity and the threat it poses to the hegemonic order.

Résumé

Cet article présente une analyse thématique de la question de genre dans la presse imprimée canadienne, en ce qui a trait à la délinquance chez les filles de 1900 à 1979. Historiquement parlant, les erreurs des filles ont toujours été considérées comme étant anormales, et ayant besoin d'explication supplémentaire. L'axe principal de la représentation médiatique des filles dites délinquantes se concentre sur la promiscuité (perçue) des filles et de la menace qu'elles posent à l'ordre hégémonique.

Introduction

This article examines the social construction of gender in Canadian news media accounts of girls' youthful offending during the earlier part of the twentieth century (1900s to 1970s), which has been characterized by an expanding social welfare orientation (Brodie 2002; Fudge and Cossman 2002; Pupo 2001). This orientation affected understandings of girls' place in society and how they should be treated. Girls' "sexual deviance" (read premarital sex, promiscuity, unwed motherhood) appears to have been the only real "threat" posed by girls (Caponegro 2009; Minaker 2006) until the very end of the twentieth century, when concerns about girls' ostensible violence exploded on the front pages of newspapers and in other media outlets. The gendered and racialized representations of violent girls in the Canadian media during the last decades of the twentieth century have been analyzed by authors such as Schissel (2006) and Barron and Lacombe (2005). In this paper, I add to these analyses by arguing that contemporary representations continue to be consistent with historical media images of delinquent girls. In the depictions of rule-breaking girls in Canadian newspapers between 1900 and 1979, girls' deviance was consistently framed as a departure from gender norms and not as natural or normal as was often the case with boys' bad behaviour (Faucher 2007). After a brief review of my theoretical and methodological frameworks, I elaborate on the gendered constructions of girls in conflict with the law against the backdrop of the socio-political terrain of the welfare state up to the 1970s. This entails an examination of the framing of girls who misbehaved as either "good girls" or "bad girls" according to a simplistic dichotomy deployed in news accounts.

Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

A review of the research literature suggests that gender analysis is one area that has been lacking in the existing research on media representations of youth, crime, and justice in Canada. Certain theoretical perspectives offer particularly useful concepts for examining the images of delinquent girls. The interdisciplinary nature of the research endeavour gave rise to the use of a social constructionist approach informed by a cultural studies perspective as well as feminist media studies (Hall 1997a, 1997b; van Zoonen 1991, 1994; Davis 1997; McRobbie 2000). I draw on the cultural studies perspective arising from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and, in particular, the work of Stuart Hall and his colleagues. The cultural studies perspective examines how dominant ideology is produced and reproduced in society. The role of the media in the routine dissemination of ideology is a central focus.

The ideologies upon which the media rely in their portrayals of female young offenders include ideologies of gender (based on assumptions about the differences between women and men and linked to the construction of hegemonic masculinity and femininity), family (suppositions about the ideal family), equality (postulating the equality of women and men), and justice (presuming the fairness of the law and its application). These ideologies also operate in the representations of others (e.g., male youths, family members); however, these representations are beyond the scope of this article.

The research presented herein stems from a larger project examining print news coverage of youth and crime (Faucher 2007). I employed a feminist lens in my thematic analysis of 1,937 news items. I adopt a broad definition of delinquency, ranging from criminal offences to status offences to forms of (supposed) deviance such as teen pregnancy, underage drinking, and running away from home, which is consistent with the definition used in media accounts (see also Caponegro 2009). The items were drawn from one randomly chosen month every four years in Canada's three largest daily newspapers in circulation from 1900 to 2000: *La Presse* from Montreal, the *Toronto Daily Star*, and *The Province* from Vancouver.[1]

The findings discussed in this paper focus on a subset of 425 articles identified as relevant for further qualitative analysis of the themes of gender and/or family from 1900 to 1979. I draw on the work of Altheide (1996, 2002), who suggests that themes consist of pre-existing ways of understanding a particular issue upon which media outlets rely when framing stories. Following a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998), the narrative theme of gender (and its corollary theme of family) in the coverage of juvenile crime clearly emerged from early interaction with the dataset. I conducted a textual analysis, which aids in the deconstruction of meaning, acknowledges that language is not neutral, and posits that the way in which an issue is discussed has real effects (see also Hall 1997a, 1997b; Henry and Tator 2002; Hogeveen and Smandych 2001; Jiwani 1993).

The choices in language and discourse signify particular constructions of gender which are highly consistent with hegemonic and stereotypical notions about proper conduct for girls. These articles were selected from the larger sample based on their inclusion of specific discussions around (appropriate) sexuality, relationships, gender-circumscribed duties of children to their parents and vice versa, physical appearance, and expectations of young people premised on their belonging to a particular gender category. In sum, these articles served to construct a gendered image of the young offenders.

Feminist media studies scholars have been concerned with the representations of gender in the media (see, for example, Benedict 1992; Gill 2007; McRobbie 2000; Ross 2010; Walters 2010). Women and girls portrayed in the news are defined by their relationships to the men in their lives (i.e., as mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, and girlfriends). They are cast within stereotypical categories of femininity (i.e., the good girl/bad girl dichotomy). Davis (1997) argues that the media perpetuate and update these dichotomous stereotypes of women and reinforce the view of women as objects and men as subjects.

A feminist approach to deconstruction compels the researcher to dissect gender stereotypes in, for example, the document, in the structure of media, in the time and place being studied, as well as in the researcher's own biases. McRobbie's work (1997, 2000) serves as a model of the complementarities between cultural studies and feminist approaches in her studies of depictions of young women in the media. She offers a critique of sexist stereotypes in media and examines youth culture from a feminist perspective, while also attributing a great deal of importance to the meaning that the female audience derives from culture in terms of consumption, production, identity, and pleasure.

In the articles analyzed here, I observed a delineation of the good girl/bad girl dichotomy. Throughout the sample, these characterizations are largely morality laden and tied to the girls' fit with conventional gender norms. Representations of female delinquents were gendered in terms of the youths' current and potential future roles as family members (daughters, future wives, and mothers) and in terms of their future roles as citizens, again with different expectations in evidence for young women and young men (see also Reitsma-Street 1998; Sangster 2002; Sharpe and Gelsthorpe 2009; Strong-Boag 1988). By taking into account the historical differences in the situations of boys and girls, we can get a better understanding of how delinquent youth are portrayed in the media. The delinquencies historically attributed to girls were much different from those of boys, and the means to control them were different as well (see, for example, Myers 2006).

Welfarism and Girls: 1900s to 1970s
The socio-political context of the 1900s to the 1970s was characterized by the expansion of the welfare state and the concept of social citizenship:

> The social citizen was very much a product of the welfare state and the assumptions of liberal-progressivism which guided governing practices in Canada until at least the mid-1970s. This governing philosophy mandated the state to intervene in the market, civil society, and the home in order to provide security for all citizens as a right of citizen-ship. The welfare state and the extensive bureaucracy built up around it were committed to the formal equality of citizens, impersonal procedures and, above all, the abiding belief that social progress could be realized through planning and the reasoned implementation of public policy. (Brodie 2002, 59–60)

For much of the twentieth century, familial ideology was premised on the assumptions that a nuclear family based on heterosexual marriage and a gendered division of labour was the highest and only acceptable form of family (see Eichler 1997; Fox 1993; Luxton 1997; Martin 2002). The assumptions about family produced and reinforced gender ideologies as well, including notions of "purity, virtue, and a caring, passive femininity" for women (Sangster 2002,6). Despite the very long period under investigation, girls and their behaviours, as constructed in the newspaper coverage, were largely based on their fit with or resistance to hegemonic gender role expectations, a tendency which varied little in the first seven decades of the twentieth century. For girls, deviance and criminality represented more of a departure from the gendered norm than they did for boys.

This discrepancy between the treatment of boys and girls has also been noted in other historical research (see Chunn 1992, 1997; Myers 2006; Sangster 2002; Théorêt 1987, 1991), suggesting that a sexual double standard existed under the welfarist *Juvenile Delinquents Act* (*JDA*) (1908–1984). Girls' misbehaviour was almost invariably sexualized (through status offences such as sexual immorality, incorrigibility, desertion, etc.), while boys were more likely to be charged with Criminal Code offences or status offences other than sexual morality, even if they were engaging in premarital sex. Many researchers have pointed out the paternalistic nature of the *parens patriae* doctrine of the *JDA* (Bala 1997; Chunn 1990; Corrado and Markwart 1992; Matters 1984; Reitsma-Street 1998; Sprott and Doob 2009; Théorêt 1991). This paternalistic attitude played out differently when it came to disciplining boys as opposed to girls or "fallen" young women.

Further, we cannot ignore that race and class anxieties also operated in the control of girls' and young women's sexuality (Minaker 2006; Sangster 2002; Valverde 2008). Girls' sexual misconduct was the main focus of concern in female juvenile delinquency (and the need to exert control over it) in the earlier decades of the twentieth century. Such was the case for most girls who came into conflict with the law; however, particular anxieties were expressed over the reproductive potential of "lower-class" and racialized girls, particularly indigenous girls (Matters 1984; Sangster 2002). And while these anxieties were not referenced in the news coverage I examined, girls' sexual immorality constituted the main focus of media attention to girls' misbehaviour during the period studied here.

Preserving the Good Girl Image

The newspaper coverage conveyed the social expectation that children were to be trained to emulate their respective same-sex parent. There were, however, some distinctions made in the prescribed point in time when boys and girls were expected to take on their respective roles (see also Priegert Coulter 2003 concerning variations in this regard between urban and rural settings). With some exceptions, boys were not expected to take on the fatherly role too early as this would usurp paternal authority (Faucher 2007). It was, however, quite helpful for the mother if her daughters began "mothering" early. Historians of motherhood and women's work have demonstrated the link between the socialization of girls and their projected "natural" roles as wives and mothers (see, for example, Arnup 1994; Baillargeon 1999; Razack 1990; Strong-Boag 1988). Absent from the coverage, however, was any suggestion that working-class girls were kept from their future housewife-in-training tasks because of their participation in the paid labour force. In fact, girls' wage-earning capacity was both a threat to parental authority and helpful to the family income (Baillargeon 1999; Myers 2006; Priegert Coulter 2003). The greater independence and freedom of these girls was presented, in abstraction from the fact that they were working in order to make a financial contribution to the family income, as a threat to the moral order.

The coverage conveyed the notion that "good" girls participated in child care and household responsibilities, played with and cared for younger siblings, baked Christmas cookies with their mothers, and were present to offer support to their mothers in difficult times. There is not sufficient information in the articles under study to assess whether these ideas in the coverage crossed racial and class lines; however, others have noted race and class distinctions in terms of the construction of gender roles (see, for example, Iacovetta 1998; Matters 1984; Sangster 2002). Furthermore, good girls abided by the authority of their fathers and were chaste. Therefore, it was clearly conveyed that girls could "play" mother, but they were not to "be" mothers.

I found discussions of girl-mothers in several news reports on young girls who had committed infanticide, abandoned their babies, or had abortions, as well as more general reports on unwed teen mothers and their "mistakes," and on the prevalence of venereal disease and abortions among girls and young women. Reports often highlighted the evident distress of many of these young women, as in this extreme example from Burlington, Wisconsin:

> ...admitting that she strangled her 3-week-old daughter because the infant cried so much and she didn't know how to take care of a baby. The young mother told police "I killed the baby and I want to be sent to the electric chair." (*The Province* 1947a, 12)

In this instance, no further information is provided about the young woman's background and circumstances to give readers context for understanding a situation such as this one. This image and others like it emphasized girls' mental or emotional inability to become mothers despite their physical ability to give birth. While the above example is one extreme on the spectrum of what girl-mothers might experience, the news media never offered a view of the other end of the spectrum, i.e., girls who might do well as mothers despite their young age or lack of a husband.

In some instances, attention was brought to efforts to train the girls with the requisite skills they would need in their lives as mothers. For example, in an article describing the work of the Vancouver Detention Home for Juveniles in the early 1950s, the Superintendent, Mr. Keys, stated,

They [the inmates] help to plan the meals, decorate the rooms, and more generally better the school.

Mr. Keys concluded that every attempt is made to "make the girls that came to the Detention Home better mothers than their own were." The Detention Home is another attempt to break the chain. (*The Province* 1951, 20)

Such rhetoric reinforces a patriarchal family ideology and its attendant gender roles for girls and women: taking care of the home and family and generally not acquiring any kind of skills that might serve them in the labour force. The article provides no information about the socio-economic status of the girls in the Home, thus eclipsing consideration of the socio-economic conditions required for one to be judged a "better mother" and simply offering such statements as taken for granted notions—everyone knows what a good mother is and does. The article also fails to inform the readers about the mothers of these girls from whom the "chain" must be broken. The nature of their inadequate parenting skills is not addressed. How did they fail their daughters? Was their daughters' presence in the Detention Home the indicator of their failure as mothers or were there other factors? The clear inference was that the girls in the Detention Home had not had adequate parenting, but the article supplies readers with no evidence to support such an assumption.

In most examples concerning girls as mothers, there was no direct implication that these were "bad girls," or that they could not be redeemed through proper training and attention, as seen in the following excerpt from the early 1960s:

[Headline:] "Unwed high school mothers keep up with their studies."

The girls and their work seem typical of any high school. Some practise typing, others answer a teacher's question about an English novel, still others study bookkeeping.

But in fact, the girls are untypical and their school is unique. The girls, most from 14 to 16, are all pregnant and unmarried...

"We are encouraging the girls and their parents—because after all we're dealing with children—to see the responsibilities involved here," said Mrs. Goodman. "Through it all is the subtle business of thinking this through and preventing it from happening again."

The school has been attacked by critics who charge it will encourage immorality.

However, Mrs. Goodman says the girls are neither promiscuous nor immoral, but children who made a mistake because they were confused. (Goodman 1963, 46)

Quotes such as those contained in the above excerpts are consistent with the paternalism exhibited by the juvenile courts under the *JDA*. Where the courts perceived that the parents had failed in their roles by not living up to white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class standards of moral propriety and child rearing, the state could and should step in to protect the children and correct their wrongful behaviour.

Shaw (2010) comments on the contemporary dominant negative stereotypes of pregnant teens and on the challenge that teen pregnancies represent to the patriarchal order of society. She argues that, even when popular media images challenge hegemonic discourses about teen moms, they do not fully eliminate the underlying stigma attached to teen motherhood. Such is also reflected in the above quote in which Mrs. Goodman characterizes the girls as "confused," the babies as "mistakes," and the girls' parents as "irresponsible." The proliferation through the 1920s to 1940s and popularization in the 1950s and 1960s of "scientific" child care expertise served to construct adequate parenthood, and particularly motherhood, in line with bourgeois patriarchal morality (Arnup 1994; Iacovetta 1998; Menzies, Adamoski,

and Chunn 2002; Strong-Boag 1988). Such standards included full-time motherhood, proper sanitation and refrigeration, moral education, and preparing girls for future housewife and mother roles. However, such standards were not in line with the lived realities of many people, for instance, those living in poverty (Arnup 1994; Baillargeon 1999; Strong-Boag 1988). The contemporary portrayals discussed by Shaw are deeply rooted and have a long history.

Overall, the coverage suggested that girls who engaged in "bad" behaviour were not necessarily "bad" girls, but some rational/socially acceptable explanation for their behaviour was needed in order to preserve the good girl image. For example, a good girl might have been led astray, but if she returned to the family home (if in fact this was a desirable situation to which to return), to the protection of her father and her mother-in-training tasks, her "good" character was considered intact (or at least salvageable).

Much more attention was paid in the coverage to runaway girls than boys, as it seems the perceived risk to a girl's character and reputation linked to running away was far greater (see also Myers 2006). For example, in a teen column published in the late 1960s, a girl wrote a letter about running away from home and taking drugs. She concluded,

> Since then I have thought about my future and what I had had interests in. I've talked to many of my relatives. They've made me realize that by taking drugs I was really going to mess myself up. I've read all I could on drugs. I've thought about how groovy it was to take drugs. I've also thought about how I'd feel if I got married and had a child born with a birth defect. It would be my fault.
>
> I have finally decided it's not worth it. To ruin anyone else's life or my own by doing something that is just a passing fad. (Dulaney and Dulaney 1967, 72)

In a study on the violence that young women experience prior to and during incarceration, Bargen (1994) also noted that a common media depiction of young women who overdosed while in prison was that they were "silly girls who had thrown their lives away" (122). This sort of minimization of the profound suffering these young women experience during incarceration is consistent with another way in which youthful misbehaviour in general, but girls' misbehaviour more particularly, was explained in the coverage. An emphasis was placed on the girls' naïveté and the fact that they could be easily led. Following a riot at the Girls' Industrial School in Vancouver in the late 1930s, the assistant superintendent, Miss Peck, said, "'Most girls in the home are good...but they are too easily led. Then there are one or two always making trouble'" (*The Province* 1939, 1). The follow-up on the next day read:

> [Headline:] "Say mass hysteria caused girls' riot"
>
> [Sub-headline:] "Blame Unruly Inmate for Reform School Fight"
>
> Mass hysteria—common in girls' schools—was responsible for the outbreak in the Girls' Industrial School in Vancouver which resulted in the escape of ten inmates and the arrest of eighteen others yesterday…
>
> It is understood that one girl's unruliness caused the outbreak which developed into mass hysteria, which for a short time was beyond the control of the staff. (*Daily Province* Staff Correspondent 1939, 1)

While portrayals of boys also suggested that they were easily led due to their young age, girls' susceptibility to influence was depicted in a fashion more consistent with the stereotype of the silly girl. The difference was subtle, but the implication was that boys would grow out of their poor judgment, but girls would not, thus relying on enduring stereotypes of girls as irrational, emotional, and less morally developed than boys, stereotypes which persisted over several decades. This image of girls is also consistent with the pathologization of women's crime (Barker 2009; Maidment 2006).

Overall, the construction of young women and girls who deviated from the norms sometimes portrayed them as fundamentally good, despite their wrong-doing. Girls who had "made mistakes" and were

repentant and prepared to return to the fold of hegemonic femininity were shown as "good girls." In contrast, some girls did not fare as well in media representations and were depicted as "bad girls."

The Bad Girl Image: Beyond Redemption

While reporters made an effort to emphasize some girls' conformity to normative femininity, it must be said that engaging in crime was a fundamental departure from these norms. In particular, sexual immorality, running away from home, underage drinking (especially among indigenous girls), and petty theft by girls appear to have been judged more harshly than those same offences by boys, as evidenced by the over-focus on girls' sexuality discussed below (see also Chunn 1992, 1997; Iacovetta 1998; Minaker 2006; Myers 2006; Sangster 2002; Sharpe and Gelsthorpe 2009; Théorêt 1987, 1991) and the blaming of girls for crimes committed by boys (see Faucher 2007; Benedict 1992; Madriz 1997; Meyers 1997). Furthermore, girl offenders were repeatedly singled out in groups of wrongdoers, often for no specific reason other than that they were girls. For example, one headline read, "Une fillette de quinze ans aide des individus à voler des automobiles" [Translation: "A 15-year-old girl helps individuals to steal cars"] (*La Presse* 1919, 11). In another report on a street fight involving 250 to 300 young people, the journalist pointed out that those figures "include[ed] a number of girls" (*The Province* 1947b, 1). These were only two of many such examples which spanned the entire study period. The over-reporting of girls' offences seems to point to the conventional notion that any deviation is greater when committed by a female. And this exaggeration, then, provides another frame against which to analyze the perceived contemporary "problem" of violent girls.

"Bad" girls were defiant, incorrigible, promiscuous, and generally unmanageable. Therefore, their character and reputation were not portrayed as salvageable, unlike the girls discussed above who preserved the good girl image. Bad girls were usually also cast as bad daughters. Promiscuity, in particular, played a key role in depictions of girls.

In some cases, cutting remarks were levelled at these young women by judges or other commentators and quoted verbatim in the news coverage, as in the following example from the late 1920s involved a young woman charged with keeping an improper resort:

> "She deserves to be in jail for 10 years," retorted her worship. "This is the worst case that has come before me for a long time. The girl has been living in the depths of degradation. She had a good home and a fine mother and father, but she chose to come to Toronto and disgrace them all. It probably does not matter to her that she has broken the hearts of her parents and four brothers.
>
> "You haven't even the grace to feel ashamed of yourself," continued her worship, addressing the girl, who didn't look in the direction of the bench. "Take that smile off your face," she added sharply. "What you deserve is a good horsewhipping and two years in Mercer reformatory. It is the most willful, deliberate case of badness I have heard in a long time." (*Toronto Star* 1927, 26)

The scorn of judges for young women who engaged in prostitution and were unrepentant was in evidence in the quotes selected for reporting in several court columns. The judges reserved a high level of contempt and vitriol for these girls, and the reporters reproduced such discourse for public consumption. This scornfulness was quite distinct from the earlier discourse of "white slavery" from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focusing on the entrapment of young women in the sex trade (see Chunn 2002; Myers 2006; Valverde 2008). The quotes in the sample rarely expressed concern for the girls themselves and what they might be exposed to in the sex trade, but rather expressed sympathy for the girls' parents, anxiety about the spread of disease, and fear for the example of immorality they furthered.

The cultural differences separating Québec from English Canada might lead us to expect significant gaps in the Anglophone and Francophone coverage. Such was not the case, although the tone used to describe delinquent youth was often softer in *La Presse* than in the *Toronto Star* or *The Province.* For instance, the following excerpt

pertains to a girl whose offences were probably also prostitution related (referenced only as "perversion"), similar to those described above as "the most willful, deliberate case of badness":

[Headline:] "Conduite chez ses parents" ["Returned to her parents"]

La jeune fille, à la suite d'un second mariage de son père, s'était vue dans l'impossibilité de rester avec sa belle-mère, et avait dû quitter le toit paternel. Malheureusement, livrée à elle-même, et privée de la direction de ses parents, à un âge si tendre, elle n'a pas tardé à donner les signes d'une perversion précoce.

[The young girl, after her father's second marriage, found it impossible to stay with her step-mother, and had to leave the paternal home. Unfortunately, left to her own devices, and deprived of parental guidance, at such a young age, she did not take long to show signs of precocious perversion]. (*La Presse* 1903, 7)

While this quote still emphasizes the immorality of the girl's perceived promiscuity, the *La Presse* excerpt does denote some attempt at empathy for the girl's situation. This difference in the coverage may also be attributable in part to the style of reporting of the two newspapers and to the contrast between the circumstances of the two homes: the former described as a "good home" and the latter one where the girl is "deprived of parental guidance." In an era that placed a great deal of emphasis on paternal protection, the offence of the girl for whom such protection was available could seem greater than that of the girl for whom such protection was not. Caponegro's review of the image of delinquent girls in the 1950s reveals similar discourse to that found here. Juvenile delinquency for girls was equated with sexual deviance (Caponegro 2009, 317).

In addition to these overt considerations of girls' sexuality, there was also rather extensive description made of their physical attributes, which was not the case in articles about boys. The description of "pretty blonde" or "blue-eyed blonde" was often used to highlight the incongruence between the girl's "wholesome" appearance and the nature of any deviant acts she might have committed. While explicit comments about a girl's racial or ethnic origin were rare in the coverage, the descriptors and, in some cases, photographs can leave no doubt as to the whiteness of the girls in question. As such, while no overt comments point to this conclusion, I would argue that deviant acts were construed in the coverage as more of a departure from the norm for white girls than for girls belonging to a racialized group (see also Chesney-Lind and Shelden 2004; Sangster 2002). In other examples, some girls were said to appear older or more mature than their actual age.

Conclusion

The constructions of girls' misbehaviour examined here serve to paint an image of girls that is steeped in stereotypes and that reinforces these very stereotypes in terms of societal expectations of its youth. The news reports largely tied girls' "goodness" or "badness" to their perceived or actual level of promiscuity, associating the characteristics of chastity and obedience with "good girls," while emphasizing any misbehaviour by girls far more than that engaged in by boys. The overwhelming focus on girls' sexual (mis)conduct hints at the social preoccupations around the threat posed by girls' sexual immorality. Girls' perceived sexual deviance threatened dominant notions of marriage, family, and femininity, and their foundational status in the social order. The fact that girls would exert control over their own sexuality in ways that were not in keeping with the normative framework challenged patriarchal authority within the family and in society more broadly. If girls' reproductive potential could not be circumscribed within hegemonic notions of proper moral and social reproduction, then repressive means were justified to help bring girls back into the fold of appropriate femininity or, at the very least, to keep them away from boys.

Despite the contemporary shift away from the patriarchal familial ideology in favour of a more egalitarian model, the patriarchal model continues to have a hold on the collective imagination and our understandings of the ideal family. As such, we cannot simply

brush off the gender stereotyped images of girls as vestiges of the past. Contemporary representations of girls also play on these notions of appropriate femininity and circumscribed sexuality, as well as race and class concerns (Barron and Lacombe 2005; Schissel 2006). Situating the so-called threat posed by girls into a gender stereotyped framework furthers the historical trend to exaggerate girls' wrongdoing and serves to draw attention away from the real and pressing concerns experienced by girls in society. It may sell newspapers, but it is neither informative nor edifying. It reinforces law-and-order mentalities and expands the groups to whom society is prepared to apply such approaches, a practice which benefits no one, least of all girls.

Endnote

1. This decision was constrained by time and resources available. Further research would be needed to include the Prairies, Atlantic Provinces, northern Territories, as well as suburban and rural areas.

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