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POSTER PROJECT PLAN:  
DE-NORMALIZING GENDER-BASED CYBERVIOLENCE

**GENDER-BASED CYBERVIOLENCE STRATEGY DESCRIPTION**



## PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document describes one of the strategies used by the Atwater Library and Computer Centre's project, *Preventing and Eliminating Cyberviolence Against Young Women and Girls*, funded by Status of Women Canada (April 2014-April 2017). In making this strategy document publicly available, we hope to offer other organisations and communities a tool that can be adapted and used in order to develop definitions of and policies around gender-based cyberviolence. In establishing clear definitions and policies, we believe that organisations and communities will be better equipped to understand, prevent, respond to and eliminate gendered cyberviolence in their respective settings.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Atwater Library and Computer Centre's *Preventing and Eliminating Cyberviolence Against Young Women and Girls* project was a 3-year project funded by Status of Women Canada. The project sought to develop strategies, in collaboration with stakeholders, that would mobilize participants to work towards the goal of preventing cyberviolence directed at girls, women, LGBTQQI2S<sup>1</sup>, and gender non-conforming people. The strategy to develop definitions, policy solutions and responses to prevent and eliminate gender-based cyberviolence emerged directly from the needs assessment we conducted during the first year of the project. Stakeholders overwhelmingly articulated that there was a need to 'name cyberviolence' through defining cyberviolence. Without clear definitions, there was no way for people who were experiencing cyberviolence to point to a definition and seek help.

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<sup>1</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Two-Spirit



## IMPETUS FOR THE STRATEGY

The primary impetus for the poster project plan emerged from the overwhelming finding expressed through all segments of respondents from the needs assessment that “Violent or misogynist online behavior normalizes that behavior and makes it more acceptable offline.” The normalization of on-line gender-based violence permeated the data from the needs assessment; according to the counselors we interviewed, cyberviolence is a huge problem at the CEGEP level: counselors reported that most of the harassment between students in the past few years occurred online and that cyberviolence is a significant online problem with offline consequences. When we asked college students to suggest strategies to prevent online cyberviolence directed at girls and young women, the most popular response was a call for more education about cyberviolence and clarification on what types of behaviors are acceptable online. Recommendations that were borne from this project include: 1) Education would need to directly focus on misogyny online and violence against girls and women. 2) Students also stressed that peer to peer education was considered an effective, influential model. Additionally, 3) involving young people in developing strategies and respecting their views was seen as crucial. Finally, 4) creative arts-based activities that engage youth and encourage them to think through the issues themselves emerged as a promising strategy to effect a change in viewpoint.

Research demonstrates that posters are particularly effective for changing people’s behavior around important social issues (Potter, Moynihan, & Stapleton, 2011; Potter & Stapleton, 2012; 2013; Potter, Stapleton, & Moynihan, 2008). This is particularly the case when the person viewing the poster can relate to the image and content. To this end, we connected with the Graphic & Web Design at a local College about enlisting their students to design posters that specifically targeted their peers and de-normalize cyberviolence.

## THE PROCESS

We initially met with the department chair and professors to discuss the issue of gender-based cyberviolence and the ways in which it manifested within their community. The professors were immediately committed to the project. We brainstormed a scenario in which we would act as ‘clients’ for the students. We planned to introduce the topic as a client and explain the nuanced aspect of the required messaging and offer feedback as ‘clients’ throughout the class assignment.

We met with a total of 135 students (in two 2 second year classes and one Adult Learning Class). We built and presented the class with our sensitization materials in the form of a power point and a facilitated discussion, which explained the Atwater Library and Computer Centre’s *Helping Communities Respond: Preventing and Eliminating Cyberviolence directed at Girls and Young Women project*. The PowerPoint also defined gender-based cyberviolence and we used findings from our needs assessment (conducted with CEGEP students) to outline some ways in which gender-based cyberviolence manifested on their campus. We allowed space for students to ask questions and share their opinions and experiences. We then explained our goal of creating a series of posters targeting a variety of student groups on campus peer to peer. Finally, we ended our session by engaging in a

collective brainstorming session where students shared insights regarding which issues or communities they specifically intended to focus on.

We returned to the classes several weeks later. At this point the students had developed rough drafts of their concepts. Students hung their draft designs as well as the designs of the feedback from their peers, from professor, and from ‘clients’, who all provided feedback – much in the manner of an art crit. We discussed whether the objective of “de-normalizing cyberviolence” had been achieved, whether their target audience was defined, and whether the message was clearly articulated. Afterwards, students incorporated these critiques into their final designs. They sent their files to us and we had the posters professionally printed by a local advertising printer who donated their machines, materials, and time to the project. Students were presented with a professionally printed version of their poster that they could also keep for their portfolio and their vernissage.

The second-year students developed their own ad copy for their work which was interesting as they demonstrated a wide range of possible target audiences from survivors, to perpetrators and from corporations to law enforcement. The Adult Learning class requested and used copy that we provided in consultation with the students and their professor.

### **SOME KEY CONCEPTS COVERED DURING THE POSTER MAKING PROJECT**

Awareness building and knowledge mobilization activities around the issue of cyberviolence – for example, we would discuss questions as:

- ◆ What is cyberviolence?
- ◆ How is it defined?
- ◆ How does it manifest?
- ◆ How is it gendered?
- ◆ How is it racialized?
- ◆ Which groups of people are disproportionately targeted (i.e. LGBTQQI2S and gender non-conforming people, etc.)?

We also shared some of the findings from the needs assessment research and from more general research on cyberviolence.

- ◆ **Discussion regarding the ethics of design and production** (i.e. what we create and share has impacts on the world around us and because we are all content producers online that has consequences)
- ◆ **Discussion regarding the power of design and art as activism**, providing some examples of poster art which have impacted social issues

## KEY ACTIVITIES DURING THE POSTER-MAKING PROJECT

- ◆ Students decided who their target market was, and who do they think needs to be reached on this issue and what do they want to say? Define a goal (de-normalization of gender-based cyberviolence or policy awareness or a “what to do if…” poster) and researched visual language for the message.
- ◆ Students developed a visual language that met the needs of all their stakeholders (target population, professor, college space, client (us), topic, message etc.).
- ◆ Students created their posters
- ◆ We printed posters professionally.
- ◆ We displayed the posters at other events (i.e. posters were showcased at a symposium we held at Concordia University).
- ◆ Posters were also showcased at a symposium we held at John Abbott College.
- ◆ We will share these posters with the larger community by sending them to our stakeholders in schools and community centres. Additionally, we plan to solicit all local CEGEPS and some local high schools to start the September 2017 school year off with the posters lining the school hallways serving both to de-normalize cyberviolence but also to begin conversations.



## REFERENCES

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