

<p>Institution: KING'S COLLEGE LONDON</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 36 (Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management)</p>
<p>Title of case study: Sexualisation of Culture and Child Protection</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Professor Gill's research on the sexualisation of culture has had a significant impact on education, public discourse and policy-making concerned with young people, media and sexualisation. These ideas have been disseminated via the media through programs such as Thinking Allowed and Woman's Hour; have impacted on understandings of Internet safety and sexualisation among governmental and non-governmental bodies (e.g. the police, the NSPCC); and have directly informed policy debate via Professor Gill's expert witness statements to Parliamentary enquiries in 2008, 2010 and 2011.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Claims that culture is becoming increasingly 'sexualised' are often characterised by more heat than light. The alleged sexualisation of culture attracts strong opinions, but there is a dearth of rigorous research to constitute a sound evidence base for practice and policy making. Professor Gill's research has been important for providing careful, theoretically-informed empirical analyses of both the nature of sexualisation and how people negotiate media cultures and public spaces that many argue are increasingly sexualised. Gill has a long track record in this field, dating from her early (1998–2000) Unilever-funded study of young men's reactions to idealised male body imagery, which remains the only empirical research on masculinity and sexualisation. Here, however, we focus on the increasing impact of her work since she joined Kings College London as Professor in Social and Cultural Analysis January 2010.</p> <p>During her time at King's, from 2010-13, Gill worked with colleagues on two important, original research projects. From 2008 to date she has worked (with Dr Sue Jackson and Dr Tiina Vares) on a Marsden Trust (Royal Society of New Zealand – value \$750,000) award that focuses longitudinally on 'tween age' girls experiences of growing up in a more sexualised culture. This group of children are repeatedly invoked as objects of concern in media and policy debates about sexualisation, but their own perspectives and experiences are rarely heard. Using an innovative suite of methodological techniques including interviews, focus groups and video diaries, the research tracks girls aged 9 until 13, as they move from primary to secondary school and into adolescence.</p> <p>In 2011 and 2012, Professor Gill worked with colleagues (Professor Sonia Livingstone, Dr Jessica Ringrose and Dr. Laura Harvey) on an NSPCC-funded study of 'sexting' in schools. Based on interviews with young people in year 8 and year 10 in two inner-city London schools, and also on analysis of the role of social media in their lives, this study offers the first qualitative understanding of how mobile Internet technologies are impacting the kinds of sexual material young people see and engage with. The research has highlighted the pivotal role played by BlackBerry messenger in both pleasurable sexual communication and sexual harassment, and has shifted the paradigm through which 'sexting' is understood, by highlighting the significance of peer networks rather than 'stranger danger'.</p> <p>Beyond these two ground-breaking studies, Professor Gill's theoretical development of ideas from her research has had a transformative impact on debates about the alleged sexualisation of culture by:</p> <p>a) foregrounding differences (that is, the different ways in which gender, race, class, age</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

and sexuality affect both who is 'sexualised' and how this is seen);

- b) changing the terms of the debate so that the notion of "objectification" is replaced by a more nuanced, Foucaultian-inspired notion of 'subjectification'
- c) highlighting the importance of power to questions of sexualisation, questioning current rhetorics of 'sexiness' as 'empowering'; and
- d) intervening in debates about media literacy (often regarded as a panacea for dealing with sexualisation) to highlight the fact that being media literate (e.g. able to discourse critically upon the techniques used to generate a sexy image) does not necessarily displace other more complicated effects on individuals and groups.

Gill's research has also had a significant impact on debate transforming understandings of power, objectification and media literacy and bringing a strong focus on difference and intersectionality to discussions of sexualisation. Her work has been translated into several different languages, reprinted repeatedly, and extensively cited. Gill's 2008 paper 'Empowerment/Sexism' is the most highly cited article ever published by *Feminism and Psychology*, and her subsequent paper in *Sexualities* has a similar profile. It is a measure of the impact of Gill's work in this field, upon scholars and students, that her book *Gender and the Media* was awarded the International Gender and Language Association prize for the most important and influential work, in 2010, almost four years after it was published.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Gill, R. (2008) 'Empowerment/sexism: Figuring female sexual agency in contemporary advertising', *Feminism & Psychology*, 18: 35-60

Gill, R. (2009) 'Beyond the "sexualisation of culture" thesis: an intersectional analysis of "sixpacks". "midriffs" and "hot lesbians"', *Sexualities*, 12 (2): 137-160

Vares, T., Jackson, S. & Gill, R. (2011) 'Preteen girls read 'tween' popular culture: Diversity, complexity and contradiction in girls' responses to 'sexualized' culture', *International Journal for Media and Cultural Politics*, 7 (2): 139-154

Gill, R. (2012) 'Media, Empowerment and the "Sexualization of Culture" debates', *Sex Roles*, 66: 736-745

Jackson, S., Vares, T., Gill, R. (2013) "'The whole Playboy Mansion thing": Girls fashioning and fashioned selves within postfeminist culture', *Feminism and Psychology*, 23 (2): 143-162.

Ringrose, J., Gill, R., Livingstone, S. & Harvey, L. (2012) *A Qualitative Study of Children, Young People and Sexting*, NSPCC: London.

Grants:

'Pornification? Complicating the debates about the 'sexualisation of culture' (ESRC grant number: RES-451-26-0783) (PI: Rosalind Gill, Co-Is: Meg Barker (OU), Emma Renold (Cardiff) and Jessica Ringrose (IoE), Jan 2010 - Feb 2012, £18K

'A qualitative study of children, young people and 'sexting' (NSPCC 2011) (PI: Jessica Ringrose (IoE), Co-Is: Rosalind Gill (King's), Laura Harvey (OU), & Sonia Livingstone (LSE), March 2011 - May 2012, £25K

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

In 2003, Gill's authority in the field was recognised by the UN Commission on the Status of

Impact case study (REF3b)

Women through her status as one of 5 international experts on gender, media and new technologies. This position has made it possible to bring about the impact in the current assessment period.

Professor Gill's background in Social Psychology and in Media and Cultural Studies gives her a unique vantage point from which to contribute to knowledge about the 'sexualisation' of culture. In fields that are known for their polarised arguments, Gill's work has made a contribution that speaks across entrenched positions, and this in part accounts for the impact of her work.

In January 2011 Gill was approached by the NSPCC to help develop their response to the Home Office enquiry on children and sexualisation, As a result of that collaboration she was invited to lead research for the NSPCC that would explore 'sexting' - that is the sending or receiving of messages with sexual content, via mobile Internet technologies, particularly smart phones.

The impacts of this research - launched in Parliament in May 2012 – have led to a paradigm shift away from familiar concerns about paedophile activity, showing that sexting is embedded in existing peer and power networks, rather than being about 'stranger danger'. At the launch of the report, Jon Brown, head of strategy at the NSPCC, said: 'What's most striking about this research is that many young people seem to accept all this as part of life. But it can be another layer of sexual abuse and, although most children will not be aware, it is illegal.'

The implications of this shift in understanding are significant and are already being taken up by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre, by schools and by Internet safety organisations such as the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCIS).

Jon Brown described the research as very important and as a result of the issues raised by the research the NSPCC is calling for all professionals to receive training in the latest technology so they are better equipped to deal with sexting. The NSPCC has also devised guidelines, based on the research, for secondary schools and the communications industry to give young people better protection through education which promotes considerate, respectful relationships.

The research has been adopted by UKCIS and incorporated in the Association for School Leaders' booklet *'Sexting in Schools: What to Do and How to Handle It; A Toolkit'*. Linda Thompson of Rape Crisis writes 'Gill's work is the first research that highlights the gendered nature of sexting.' These findings directly informed the advice on teacher education contained within the teacher training materials.

Numerous speaking engagements and requests have followed publication - most of them to educationalists (e.g. school governors), health practitioners and organisations concerned with stopping bullying and violence. These engagements include Gill's keynote at the Rape Crisis conference in Glasgow in October 2013.

In addition to policy and practice impacts, Professor Gill's research has also had impact on public debates via her appearances on such programs as Thinking Allowed and Woman's hour, discussing issues such as sexualised advertising.

Gill's interventions in debates about sexualisation have also had considerable impact beyond the UK. In 2010 she gave evidence to UNESCO and UNDAW. In March that year she was accorded the great honour of addressing the European Parliament in Strasbourg, on the occasion of International Women's Day. In September 2012 she took up a position as Chair of the Scientific Committee on a European directive concerned with improving the representation of women both on and off screen. Gill's remit includes highlighting areas of best practice and excellence across European media organisations.

Impact case study (REF3b)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)Media appearances:

Thinking Allowed, Radio 4, 4th May 2009 and 11th July 2011

Contacts:

Head of Strategy and Development (Sexual Abuse), NSPCC (Use of research to develop guidelines for secondary schools and the communication industry)

Development Officer, Rape Crisis, <http://www.womenssupportproject.co.uk/> (Gill's research instrumental in providing teacher training materials)

NSPCC Reports:

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforprofessionals/sexualabuse/sexting-research_wda89260.html

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/policyandpublicaffairs/consultations/2011/premature_sexualisation_pdf_wdf81574.pdf

Press coverage of Gill's address to European Parliament.

http://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/news_details.php?news_id=1300&year=2010

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-18088334>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2145534/Teach-year-olds-dangers-sexting-expert-warns.htm>

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/sexting-shock-kids-as-young-as-eight-836683>

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/newsevents/news/newsrecords/2012/05May/Sexting.aspx>