



Women's Media Watch-Jamaica

In collaboration with

Kingston and St. Action Forum Women Leaders



**Gender
Advocates
Challenging
Sexism and
Violence in
Popular Media**

April 17, 2010

held at

**Caribbean Conference of Churches
Kingston, Jamaica**

Advocates Challenging Sexism and Violence in Popular Media

Sat. April 17, 2010

This workshop was one in a series of training sessions on Gender, Media and Advocacy, hosted by Women's Media Watch with support from the **World Association of Christian Communication**.

Participants

These were 16 Women Leaders from various communities in Kingston, St. Andrew and St. Catherine, identified through WMW's links with the Kingston and St. Andrew Action Forum. Most of the participants have already attended one or two gender training sessions with WMW and are therefore ready to undertake some advocacy with respect to the ongoing concerns expressed by many citizens about sexism and violence in popular media and how this contributes to the high levels of violence against women in Jamaica. As active leaders and advocates for citizens' rights and women's rights, this group is a key target audience for WMW.

WMW Facilitators: Hilary Nicholson, Afolashade and Dorothy Purge (Rapporteur)

Workshop Objectives

- Strengthen skills of women's rights advocates in gender-aware analysis of media and their knowledge of relevant policies re. women's and children's rights.
- Encourage participants to respond to sexism and violence in the media and become more active media users.

1. Media portrayals and influences : introduction to issues and sharing ideas

Facilitators introduced the session by saying that Media can have positive and negative influences and participants were invited to give one or two examples . They expressed their concerns firstly about sexually explicit ads and dancehall lyrics.

Participants identified some positives:

- Information
- Entertainment.
- Fashion news and ideas
- Movies provided all three of the above positive, but also contained high levels of overt sexuality and violence which participants had concerns about

One example spotted of a positive advert is the Victoria Mutual, "*Daddy is here.*"

- The Facilitators asked what are some eg's of VALUES/IDEALS learned from media? Any that deal with sexuality or violence?
- Religious media and gender roles: participants discussed some of the traditional and less traditional gender portrayals and how this influences attitudes, preferences and expectations of both women and men
- Persons gave their views on the 'pinch an inch' advert. which gives information on how a condom should be used. While some persons thought that too much information was being given others felt that the advert shows affection. The time when the advert is aired was also of concern.
- Participants agreed that parents should monitor what their children watch on television and cable because there are forms of violence in video games and also cartoons.
- Though some participants agreed that incidents of violence should be shown on television (*because this is the reality in our society*) others disagreed. Particular reference was made to an incident which occurred in Papine, Kingston, where a man chopped another several times and the scene was shown on television.
- Arising from the discussions the question was raised as to whether or not our society is more concerned about sex in the media rather than violence.
- We need 'media literacy' for parents, youth – i.e. being active audiences so we can examine & respond actively, and critique/challenge offensive.

2. Activity : Critiquing Sexist Posters and Ads

Given the increasing number of sexist ads, and the broad based concern building about the 'energy drink' ads for Mandingo, Magnum and Jagra, these were discussed. A poster was displayed and the television ads which participants had seen for these products were also analysed. The Facilitator used guided questions to ensure the participants maintained a gender lens in their comments.

The first round of discussion was on the following concerns about the ads:

- pressure on girls to look a certain way and be just 'sexy'
- pressure on boys re sexual prowess

Next, participants did a detailed critical analysis of adverts on posters and TV for some of the 'newer' energy drinks that were raising many concerns.



Summary of gender-responsive critique of *Jagra*, *Magnum* & *Mandingo* Ads

- Picture of a woman, almost nude: No image of man nor a man having the drink.
- The *Jagra* ad – like the *Mandingo* ad - is clearly selling sex because the images and the words all have sexual suggestions.
- Is *Jagra* or *Mandingo* a health drink or a sex-enhancing drink? If it is for sexual enhancement or stimulation it is not supposed to be openly advertised (Viagra not advertised openly?)
- The focus on the woman's bottom is over-done (is it digitally manipulated?) and it is very sexual, she is in a sexually provocative position
- 'Rule It Right' in *Jagra* ad– what is this referring to? This has deliberate sexual suggestions, that the man is supposed to rule (i.e. control, dominate) the woman – he can use force if necessary to 'rule' or control. This is offensive and also a dangerous message to be sending – promoting sexual violence?
- In *Jagra* ad, the 'heavy equipment' connotation is degrading and the 'hard hat' message has a sexual implication, maybe suggesting hard sex (hard core)



- Would teenagers who go to parties have this same drink as adult men? Consider the lyrics that would follow building up intensity in young people.
- This is not the portrayal of females or males that we want to see ; we find these ads degrading and offensive and sending wrong messages to children. and even to adults

Exercise: The group was divided into 3 groups – one as 'males'; one as '12 year olds', one as 'women' . Each group was required to develop two or three questions, typical of the group they represent, which could be used as catalyst for discussion around sexist images. Some sample QUESTIONS developed by groups were as follows

Women: Are the images of women portrayed in the media realistic?

MEN : Should men do household duties?

Child : Is it true that if I drink *Mandingo* and get energy, I will feel like a big man and can do 'big man tings'?

Each group then spent some time planning how they would respond to the question and explore the issue.

3. Exploring Gender Messages in Dancehall Culture

- **Hot Wuk:** - Example of gender stereotypes for woman and man
 - male fantasy re sexy girl at home – always available
 - male sexuality linked to work-activity
 - female sexuality only body and sex – to satisfy male desires
 - multi – partnering; ‘hard core’ sex normalized
 - Sets expectations of how girls should look – affects girls/boys
 - **QUESTIONS to ask ourselves, and youths, to critique**

Gender-responsive Critique of Music Video “Hot Wuk”

Issues raised in discussion among Participants with guided questions from Facilitators:

- Don surrounded by women doing what HE wants them to do ; women doing as men say and seem to be okay with it
- The male figure is not ‘wining’ he is composed
- Women are in traditional roles such as cooking, in maid’s clothes – yet they are there as entertainment (sexual) for the male
- The video makes painful experiences seem to be normal – Sexual pain as pleasure - suggests then it is not real sex unless it’s painful ? In truth, physiologically and emotionally painful sex can be damaging
- Certain behaviours seem normal in the video, which aren’t really normal
- The images in music videos (eg) don’t necessarily match the lyrics of the songs
- We need to be more aware of what are the values, messages promoted in ads and music videos that are powerful messages about sex and relationships
- For example, one man with many women, man as a symbol of power; sexual power and how women use it



- We hardly see this in reverse, ie one woman with plenty men, so this is normalizing mutl-partnering by men
- The body language – the juxtaposition of images and messages – brings out things we may not see at first.
- Is there anything wrong with ‘selling sex’, i.e. using sex to sell products? It depends on the context, the audience, the underlying value system, the message

about sex (healthy practices vs unhealthy) and whether it exploits a child, a woman or anyone.

- Both men and women or boys and girls are affected by the content
- **Portraying sexuality or sexual violence without regard to impact or audiences is irresponsible.**
- **Broadcasting Commission should put advisories before certain music videos and ads (ref Jagra, Mandingo etc)**

4. Control, Power and Violence in Popular Media

It was noted that portrayals of power and control can be both empowering or disempowering when power/control is coercive and violent.

Positive images of power and control as portrayals of autonomy :

Participants viewed an Advertisement by NEM Insurance company which read: *WOMAN IN CONTROL - for Women on WHEELS.* The advert has the face of a woman but no vehicle, only the words on the remainder of the leaflet. Participants critiqued the advert and some questions/findings were:

- What was the woman in control of? Though there was no photo of a car the words “Women on Wheels” spoke to being a car owner/driver.
- The advert was well designed.
- The woman was attractive therefore people would want to read the leaflet.
- Some participants said she looked too much as an upper-class woman. Others did not think so.
- Most participants felt she looked confident – giving an impression that she was actually in control and not being a product.
- Several participants really liked the advert , saying they felt empowered by it, and really liked the recognition that women are indeed in control.

Conclusion: There should be more advertisements similar to the one above portraying women in positive ways and being in control. This poster was compared with that of the *Jagra* and a discussion about manipulation developed, concluding on the note that manipulation can be positive or negative.

A second Poster was displayed, showing a woman and a man sitting at a computer seeming to be in dialogue. Participants were asked to do similar critiquing exercise as with earlier images.



Observations by participants:

- The woman was in control – **she was sitting at a higher angle than the man.**
- The woman appeared confident; perhaps trying to convince the man to buy a product.
- The man could have been her boss reporting to him
- The man showed sign of 'sensitive' male ego
- They were at an even distance from each other – not close-up – that showed total respect, no form of intimacy.
- Woman and man showed signs of good communication
- There was no form of sexism shown.

Conclusion: The advert was balanced.

Activity: Viewing and discussion of DVD on Dancehall portrayals of sexual violence and the links between portrayal of woman and VAW

5. Action Time

- **Activity:** Learning about the **Broadcasting Commissions Children's Code for Programming** and the **Convention on the Rights of Child's** (Articles relating to protecting children from injurious material)
- Tips for Parents & Community Leaders - handout.
- **Activity: ROLE PLAY ACTIVITY** – Preparation in 2 small Groups

Scenarios:

Grp A: PTA Barbeque planned with Vybz Kartel as main act. Is he appropriate? If you do not think he is appropriate - prepare your arguments to convince other members of the PTA to get a different artiste.

Grp B: Two teenagers (male & female) always take the coaster that plays music that is sexist – sometimes has violence, and DVDs that you consider inappropriate. You have a discussion with the teens about this.

Group Presentations & Issues raised by Group to support their argument :

Group A: PTA's decision regarding Entertainer

- Vybz Kartel's disturbing behaviour (over sexualized; promoting rivalry; disrespect to women; excessive tattooing; sexual violence in lyrics)
- Other positive artistes exist, such as Taurus Riley, Etana and we could invite them to pass through and give even one song

- Degrading expressions in his lyrics especially negativity against women in some of his lyrics –
- Our role is to be protecting the rights of our children
- The event is part of our children’s education event though it is being held at night, and therefore looking out for the well being and setting good example should be our priority – doing what is good for our children must still be the guiding principle of our activity, even though we want to make money
- The image of Kartel is negative and there is disturbing background information on him – the children wont listen to the positive songs, they will identify with the hype surrounding him, the questionable things he stands for, including violence -as well as any positive things we can say for him
- School values and Christian principles should be guiding us in this decision
- Although some persons suggest we could talk to VK and get him to sing something appropriate, this does not change the fact that his overall image does not portray the values of our school and community



Group B : Encouraging students to avoid buses with inappropriate (sexist, violent) media

Issues raised by Group to support their argument :

- Listen to the words of the songs, even as you enjoy the riddim, to see if these are songs you want to identify with
- Children should not be exploited in buses, or any other commercial enterprise
- Convention on the Rights of The Child: exposing children to harmful and degrading material is a violation of the Convention therefore our government has a mandate to protect them
- The Values expressed in the commercial media that we are objecting to, the specific songs and ads, are not the values that many of our own children and youth would adhere to, if they were not being pressured by the hype
- Exposing yourself to sexually explicit or violent media, puts you in a situation where you yourself can become a victim of sexual acts or violence. One example is where people take a photo of you, without your knowledge, and associate you with the bad behaviour around you on the buses that you yourself would not engage in, but you are just there because you like to hear the music.
- You will be labelled if you hang out with youth who are engaging in behaviour that is sexually inappropriate or violent

- Respect yourself; display respectful behaviour to get the respect of others
- Think about how you want to be portrayed
- Adults can sometimes accompany children and students to the bust stop to prevent the problem of children boarding buses where inappropriate ads, music, behaviour is prevalent.
- Safety of our children must be a top priority.

Facilitators gave brief feedback on the participatory activity, and invited persons to highlight any point of 'advocacy' in the role play scenarios that we particularly effective.

In concluding participants were asked to remember their responsibilities as women's rights adocates also includes our role to critique and challenge offensive sexist and violent portrayals in media; to disseminate information to communities and work places and to be active advocates.

6. EVALUATION

Participants were asked what they felt they had learnt- responses were:

- Critiquing skills
- How to respond actively
- How empowerment can be used in a positive way
- How to respond to images about power and control in sensitive ways.
- *Caution:* Every media advert is carefully constructed.

Then, participants completed short evaluation forms with the following questions:

- **How far were your objectives or expectations met?**

Fully : 30%

Mostly : 60%

Fairly : 10%

- **How useful and relevant were the content and the activities?**

Very useful 100% (2 persons said 'very, very')

- **How effective was the methodology used**

Very effective: 100% (1 said 'excellent', 1 said 'very, very!')

- **What overall rating would you give to the session?**

Average rating: 9.2 out of 10

- **Give at least one useful idea which you have learned:** (sample responses below)
 - How women are manipulated in the media, the way women are portrayed.
 - I can call a media house and let them know how I feel about an ad or something that I think should not be on air.
 - I learned a lot from the sharing of views, the information, and the different perceptions that were brought forward in the discussion.
 - I learned how to critique the way that the media and ads portray women.
 - I learned how the portrayal of women and the manipulation of images of women is part of the problem of sexism and violence against women. We must be a part, with other groups, of the fight against violence against women.
 - I have learned that pictures of women you sometimes see on posters or ads or on tv are sometimes being manipulated.
 - My eyes were opened to the way that the media portrays women and gender stereotypes
 - I have learned that we can use a picture, an ad, a poster to start a conversation

Informal participatory evaluation:

Participants were also encouraged to give verbal comments. These mostly referred to 'eyes being opened' about issues they had not really thought much about. Some said they had a new sense of confidence in talking about things in the media that they found offensive.

Two participants highlighted their new knowledge about the CRC including protection for children against harmful media, as well as their improved understanding of the Children's Code (ref. Broadcasting Commission).

Evaluation by Facilitators.

Level of participation was very good. There was a noticeable improvement in many participants' ability to articulate their ideas and concerns about media portrayals that they were uncomfortable with or found directly offensive.

The ability to make links between details of portrayals and the overall notion of 'sexism' or 'gender discrimination' was noticeably improved. The links between mediated sexist portrayals and the influences on behaviour were understood, and participants made several useful links and observations to real life experiences.

MATERIALS

Print Ads (Woman on Wheels, Computer ad)

Mandingo or **Jagra** Poster

Gender Matters – Booklets

DVD: Portrayal of Women in Dancehall Posters

Hot Wuk (music video)

Handouts: - Media Violence Influence on Children

- Media Stereotypes of Men
- Media Tips for Parents
- CRC Articles on Children and Media