

Montreal Council of Women

Thursday, November 5, 2015

Guest Speaker

Professor Shaheen Shariff, McGill University

Rape Culture at Universities

Dr. Shaheen Shariff of McGill University, and affiliate at the Center of Internet and Society at Stanford Law School, is an internationally recognized authority on emerging socio-legal, educational and public policy issues relating to the use of social media among youth and young adults. She is also the Director of [Define the Line Projects](http://www.definetheline.ca) www.definetheline.ca and on the Board of Directors of [Kids' Help Phone](http://www.kidshelp.ca). In addition, she has authored several books, collaborated on five national and international projects on cyberbullying and digital citizenship, and as well is a regular news media commentator on Television, Radio and print media nationally, internationally and locally on issues of sexting and cyberbullying, policy development and diversity.

Dr. Shariff spoke to members of the Montreal Council of Women about addressing cyber-sexual violence and moving from reactive to sustainable prevention of rape culture on university campuses. She said that rape culture is rooted in discrimination and emerges as sexist behavior including jokes, harassment, non-consensual distribution of intimate images and rape. There is now a higher threshold for insults, sexism and offensive slurs. Many universities are responding to the rape culture on campus with action plans. McGill organized a conference on consent and the responsibility of bystanders.

Studies on the attitudes of three age groups of digitally empowered kids towards sexting and cyberbullying provide insight into social norms. The age groups studied were 9-12 year olds, 13-17 year olds and 18-30 year olds. Of the youngest cohort 18% do not care about what they posted and 11% do not recognize the consequences of their actions. Of the 13-17 year olds 37% simply do not care and 61% of this cohort considers cyberbullying to be harmless fun. Of the university aged cohort, 19% engage in cyberbullying to torment, 10% because it is the social norm, 22% to retaliate and 10% simply to discriminate.

McGill is partnering with some other universities to determine barriers that influence rape culture, perform risk assessment regarding social media and online news, develop policy and practice, and most importantly, provide legal literacy along with information on available human rights remedies.