

ISSUE 5,
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NEGOTIATING THE 'GAZE'

Earlier this month, CMGI called upon for submissions from the institute's ecosystem wanting to hear from you- your experiences, your opinions, your perspectives- in whatever medium you would want to express. We wanted this to also be a space to voice yourself, bring out your subjectivities and have the campus listen! We hope that these become conversation-starters on discourses surrounding the various issues regarding gender and higher education, especially in the STEM disciplines and within the institute; and that sensitivity and awareness around sexual harassment, gender bias and discrimination, and related issues strengthens.

We are glad to announce that we will be curating and bringing out two newsletters from your submissions. We have tried to group them around a theme and the first one here seems to be around the (male) gaze women are subject to, most often that not. Laura Mulvey (1975) and John Berger (1972) largely talk about how this is so deep rooted that the entire lives of women almost surround it different ways. Right from childhood, she has been convinced to envisage herself, to survey herself continually, because how she appears (and especially to men) is of utmost significance. Thus, she is both the surveyor and the surveyed of her own self. Her own sense of being and identity becomes related to her sense of how she is observed or perceived as. If you want to learn more about this and how it shapes the being for a woman, you can watch the [BBC series of 'Ways of Seeing'](#).

In this newsletter, we publish the experiences of the submitters around the theme through the various mediums they chose to express themselves.

THE CONVERSATIONS WE HAVE WITH OUR CLOTHES

Since childhood I have been aware that the clothes that women wear are layered with many coded messages. I knew the maths teacher who wore pants to class was “cooler” than the English teacher who wore a “Salwar Kameez”. At some level clothes and appearances project messages about everyone, but in my personal experience this process was a lot more apparent for women.

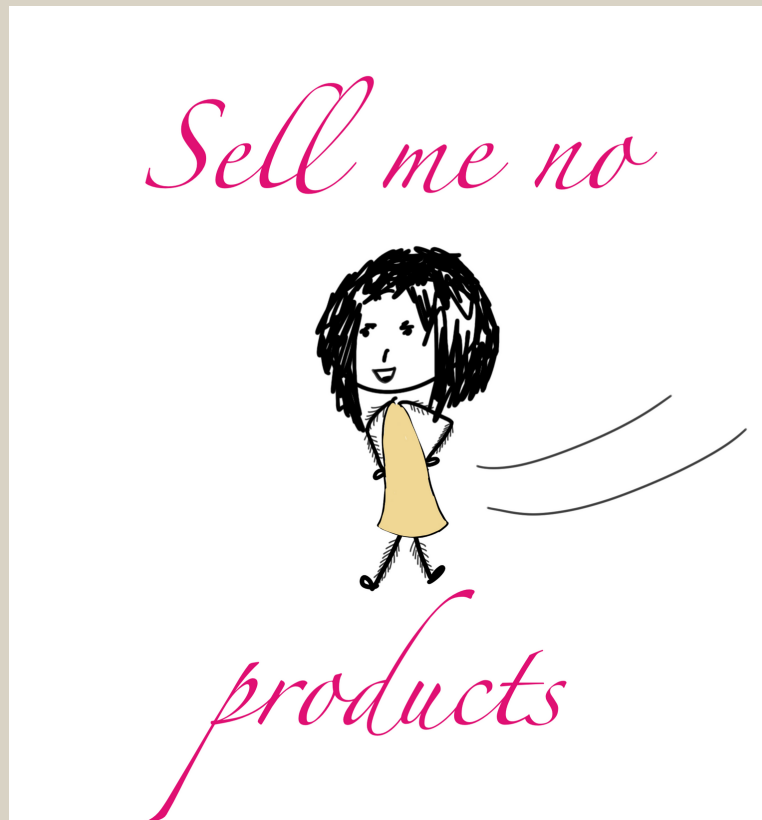
It was in class 10 that I was introduced to the idea that some clothes indicated “bad behaviour” while others indicated “innocence”. During this time, teachers would interrupt a class to measure a female student’s skirt, or make a passing comment on her long open hair. All the social cues together convinced me that there are two types of women – the good ones who are interested in studying, and the bad ones who party, argue with teachers and seek attention from boys. This binary never had any logical basis, and was extremely unfair to a class of women who simply chose to not tie their hair at school. At some level I knew this, but even I carried the same animosity for this group. Everyone around me endorsed this world view – my friends, my teachers, and my own mother. We truly believed that the world would reward the “good women” who dress modestly, do not argue, and quietly focus on their goals.

None of us at any point created a similar binary for the boys in my class. These boys were allowed to “make mistakes” or “have a rebellious phase” without being labelled as a troublemaker for life. No parent or teacher ever undertook the same level of mental jujitsu to understand what “boys clothing” said about their personality. Their clothes were just clothes, and mistakes just mistakes. They got the best of both worlds – they were allowed to experiment and experience youth, and still come out of it without a lifelong label.

These assumptions really come to head in college, where all sorts of women (“good” or “bad”) make it to the same place. There is an animosity for the other side, as they got to have fun and still be successful – an idea my parents and teachers considered impossible. In such cases, instead of going back to the drawing board and reconstructing the value system we were raised with, most of us simply decide to criticise the other women. We become instruments in the same patriarchal system, slut-shaming fellow women because of their clothes and personality traits. I remember how some of the closest friends I have now- are women I hated initially. They exercised agency, when I didn’t and somehow this disparity was their fault.

It took years of conscious unlearning and quality female friendships for me to step out of this mentality. Finally, now, I wear whatever I want, and I am sure there are some female peers of mine who judge me for my choices. I also know this is not entirely their fault.

- Avantika Mathur
PGP II Student



- Anonymous Submitter

Women's Disempowerment and Preferences for Skin Lightening Products That Reinforce Colorism: Experimental Evidence From India

Arzi Adbi , Chirantan Chatterjee, Clarissa Cortland, Zoe Kinias, and Jasjit Singh (2021)

"Global racism and colorism, the preference for fairer skin even within ethnic and racial groups, leads millions of women of African, Asian, and Latin descent to use products with chemical ingredients intended to lighten skin color. Drawing from literatures on the impact of chronic and situational disempowerment on behavioral risk-taking to enhance status, we hypothesized that activating feelings of disempowerment would increase women of color's interest in stronger and riskier products meant to lighten skin tone quickly and effectively. In two experiments (Experiment 1: N $\frac{1}{4}$ 253 women and 264 men; Experiment 2: replication study, N $\frac{1}{4}$ 318 women) with distinct samples of Indian participants, we found that being in a state of psychological disempowerment (vs. empowerment) increased Indian women's preference for stronger and riskier skin lightening products but not for milder products. Indian men's interest in both types of products was unaffected by the same psychological disempowerment prime. Based on these findings, we recommend increased consideration among teaching faculty, research scholars, and clinicians on how feeling disempowered can lead women of color to take risks to lighten their skin as well as other issues of intersectionality and with respect to colorism. We also encourage the adoption of policies aimed at empowering women of color and minimizing access to harmful skin lightening products.

- Submitted by Chirantan Chatterjee. Faculty, Strategy, Economics Area

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We hope to come soon to you with our next issue. In the meantime, you can check out our previous issues

EVOLUTION OF THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT LAWS IN INDIA

"Despite the institutional mechanisms accorded by law, the recourse to and implementation remains a question as made very evident by the rising #MeToo movement in the country. Millions of women took to social media to speak up against their abusers, especially at the workplace and how the institutional mechanisms in place, coloured with gender bias and power structures, have failed countless women."

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CAMPUS CULTURE: DATING AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

"“Whenever I have to study or work with someone, I always choose the library. Even if we have to study in our rooms, I always choose to go to the male colleague’s room so I can leave when I want to”, revealed a student."

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“BECAUSE SHE IS A WOMAN”: NARRATIVES AROUND CAREER AND SUCCESS

"What is more, all our female respondents mention that the language and demeanour of male classmates and seniors feels very condescending when it comes to their placements and careers. “They just dismiss our anxiety and stress regarding placements. They think we have it easy while they have to slog. It is misplaced [passive] aggression”, another student spoke, quite agitatedly."

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"I QUIT": CONSEQUENCES FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMPLAINANTS

"...those filing sexual harassment complaints (at work specifically) are often re-victimised with largely two kinds of retaliation, namely work retaliation (demotions, involuntary transfers, poor performance appraisals, etc.) which negatively alter aspects of survivor’s job, and social retaliation (less tangible but serious social reprisals like name-calling, ostracism, threats, etc.) which often take both verbal and non-verbal forms, intimidating and harming the survivor’s interpersonal relationships. More often than not, colleagues feel compelled to distance themselves or delegitimize the survivor in fear of similar punishments for supporting a “trouble-maker”."

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