

**ESRC Seminar on Complicating the debates about the Sexualization of Culture King's College**

**SEMINAR 4: Friday March 25<sup>th</sup> 2011. 10.30 AM - 4.30 PM**

10.15-10.30 AM Registration

10.30 AM Introduction and Welcome

11.00 AM Clare Bale

“Bridge Over Troubled Water: Researching the relationship between sexualised culture and young people’s health a personal perspective”

11.45 AM Adrienne Evans

‘Visual Economy of the Postfeminist Gaze’

12.30 PM LUNCH at Thai Square restaurant

2.00 PM Alex Brew

WORKSHOP: Feminist Direct Action

3.30 PM Allan Tyler

“Agencies”: Sex Work and Semiotics

4.30 PM Seminar ends

## **Abstracts**

### **Clare Bale**

“Bridge Over Troubled Water: Researching the relationship between sexualised culture and young people’s health - a personal perspective”

Concern about the impact of sexualised culture on adolescent health is a hot topic in the UK. Reported consequences include early sexual initiation, risky sexual practices, unrealistic expectations of sex, and, violence towards women. Perspectives are largely polarised into frequently emotive ‘for’ and ‘against’ arguments which form ‘troubled water’, in which, the views and experiences of young people themselves are often ignored or marginalised.

The aim of this paper is to describe how my attitudes, values and beliefs have shifted through conducting empirical research with young people into their relationship with sexualised society. I use young people’s accounts to explain this process, and illustrate how, through greater understanding of their experiences I have formed a ‘bridge’ to navigate polarised positions, suggesting implications for health related practice.

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### **Adrienne Evans**

‘Visual Economy of the Postfeminist Gaze’

This paper contributes to the debates concerning the creation of new femininities and postfeminist subjectivities within the sexualisation of culture by re-evaluating notions of desire and the ‘male gaze’. In a culture where women now increasingly gaze at both other women and at themselves, the male gaze has in some contexts apparently been removed all together. But concerns have been raised concerning an internalization of the male gaze and the production of a narcissistic neoliberal self-policing gaze (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Goldman 1992). Drawing on twenty individual interviews, this paper analyses how the women in one study of sexualisation evaluated their own (hetero) sexy worth when discussing the intensity and complexity of these new regulatory gazes. The paper concludes by suggesting that within the sexualisation of culture, postfeminist practices of looking have become important technologies of subjectivity. They hold within them the power

to confirm or deny women's heterosexual worth within the discourses of insecurity, narcissism and self-regulation.

### **Alex Brew**

#### **WORKSHOP: Feminist Direct Action**

As the debates around feminism become more complicated and nuanced, it can be difficult to know what sort of feminist activism to get involved in. This session will try to get beyond the obstacles to action to discuss what we're willing to do here and now.

### **Allan Tyler**

#### **"Agencies": Sex Work and Semiotics**

'Sex work' is a term that is used to denote prostitution, as well as a range of other work – including prostitution – that implies or necessitates sex, directly or indirectly. This paper examines how semiotics can be used to illuminate and possibly progress discourses of sex work by deconstructing how other types of work, particularly escorting and massage, have become metonyms for selling sex and how 'prostitution' is no longer a word that just describes selling sex, but is itself a metonym for the exploitation, trafficking and abuse of vulnerable women. The paper examines 'small ads' that were placed by men who advertised as escorts or masseurs to other men in *Boyz* magazine from 1991 to 2010. The form and content of the advertisements are compared with each other individually, across categories, and by year to understand ways that men represented themselves and map trends throughout the 20 years of the magazine's publication. The analysis of the advertisements is further contextualised and findings are triangulated through interviews conducted with men who have placed advertisements and with the magazine's managing director. This paper reports on how different types of sex work have historically been represented together with prostitution, the effects these advertisements have on each other, on clients' expectations of services, and how discourses about sex work are constructed even as they are (sometimes mis-) represented. By focusing exclusively on men who advertise as escorts and masseurs to men, this research expands understanding of debates on prostitution by giving voice to the

narratives of the men who are self-promoting and self-employed. Further, examining patterns of how men represent themselves in the sale of sex to other men creates a more in-depth understanding of what role gender may play in constructions of power and what other constructs of power may be at play.

Allan Tyler, London South Bank University.