

Sexual Exploitation of Girl Children in the Entertainment Industry in Ontario and Quebec

An interview with Professor Clara Chapdelaine-Feliciati (International Studies) who was recently awarded a SSHRC Insight Development Grant (2020-2022) for her legal and bilingual project '*Sexual Exploitation of Girl Children in the Entertainment Industry in Ontario and Quebec.*'

Please briefly summarize this project.

In this project I conduct a comparative analysis of legislation and case law in Ontario and Quebec from a legal semiotics perspective to assess whether girl child performers are sufficiently protected against sexual exploitation both *de jure* and *de facto*. This project also involves consultations and interviews with stakeholders. My research is located at the intersection of entertainment law, employment and labour law, child law, feminist studies, and criminal law. The objective is to empower girl performers through law and policy reform, awareness-raising and training.

How does this research impact those beyond your specific field of academic study?

My project bears on the entertainment industry and is thus pertinent for scholars in communication and culture; it concerns crimes committed against children, and thus criminology. Moreover, the sexual exploitation and objectification of girls in the entertainment industry, and the lack of protection from authority figures, including some parents who 'turn a blind eye', is relevant for scholars in the fields of sociology and psychology. Finally, the policy process to effect law reform concerns politics and public administration.

In fact, I favour interdisciplinary research, and co-founded, with Professors Deanne Williams (English literature) and Natalie Coulter (communications), the Girls' Studies Research Network at York University in 2019, and we host bi-annual 3x3 symposiums and welcome scholars who conduct research in girls' studies from all disciplines, including childhood studies, gender, feminist and women's studies, nursing, law, dance and French literature.

How did you come to choose this research topic?

During my years as Child Rights Project Officer at the UNICEF Office of Research, and when directing the research study on child trafficking in Canada at the



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International Bureau for Children's Rights, I realized that many studies tended to examine children as a homogeneous group and failed to tackle issues expressly or predominantly experienced by girls. This led me to pursue a PhD in Law on the legal status of girl children in international law (Oxford 2016), and to examine specific issues, such as feminicide (Brill: Leiden 2018). I also noticed that the issue of the sexual exploitation of girls in the entertainment industry is under-researched, for most studies focus on other violations, such as child marriage. We have been sold the myth that girl performers are privileged celebrities whose lives of stardom are filled with luxury and glitter, even though the entertainment industry has been plagued with allegations of exploitation and abuse. The #MeToo movement shed light on sexual harassment and violence, yet it focused on female adults, and this prompted me to ask the following questions: 1) what about girls? and 2) are girls better protected in Canada than in the USA?

Tell us about the challenges that you as a researcher will have to overcome in order to do this work.

The first challenge is that I will be examining legislation and case law in two different legal systems. Quebec has a civil law tradition and is based on the Quebec Civil Code, whereas Ontario is rooted in the Common Law system which focuses on jurisprudence and the doctrine of precedent. My trans-systemic legal training at the McGill Law Faculty will thus be essential to this endeavour. The second challenge is that my project is bilingual: the documents I will examine and the interviews will take place in both French and English, and I plan to author a bilingual report and publications in both languages. Another challenge is that there have been significant new developments in legislation concerning performers in both Ontario and Quebec, and I will therefore have to ensure that my research takes those into consideration as my work progresses. And finally, a significant challenge, which is both ethical and emotional, is that the topic of sexual violence and exploitation of girl performers is still taboo and raises several discussions that are uncomfortable for the general public. Former victims can be stigmatized and experience double-victimization once they report the crime. They may fear retaliation, including physical threats, from producers and managers who can 'end' their careers. It is thus essential to ensure that interviews are conducted in a safe environment, which may be more difficult due to covid-19 restrictions that preclude in-person interviews.

For more information:

Professor Clara Chapdelaine-Feliciati's Glendon College Profile: <https://www.glendon.yorku.ca/faculty-profile-details/?currentuserid=791593>

Girls' Studies Research Network:
<https://cfr.info.yorku.ca/research-clusters/girls-studies-york-research-network-gsyrrn/>