



Editorial STUDENT PRECARIOUSNESS

ASSÉ's Executive Council

"It's okay to be poor when you're a student!"

Precariousness refers to a state of financial and/or social insecurity resulting from one's material conditions.

For students, precariousness is seen in necessary expenses: housing (such as rent and electricity), school supplies (such as textbooks), tuition fees (which are constantly rising and at a faster rate than income), living expenses (such as groceries and clothing), transportation, etc. These expenses are particularly related to the simple fact of studying, but are added to the usual cost of living. For example, a student with disabilities will have to cover their health-related expenses, on top of all the rest. Several other socioeconomic factors can contribute to this state of precariousness. For example, being a parent or having a large amount of student debt will lead to even more expenses.

One of the reasons why these expenses have such an impact on students is because, in 2015¹, nearly half of all minimum wage jobs

were occupied by post-secondary students. The current minimum wage is well below what's required for a decent quality of life, and its indexation "to the cost of living" is ineffective in countering social inequalities. In fact, the cost of a standard basket of food is rising faster than the inflation to which the increase of the minimum wage is adjusted to². The current minimum wage in 2016 is \$10.75, but according to the Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques (IRIS), the hourly wage for a person living alone in Montreal would have to be \$15.78, and in

«These financial issues go beyond what a student may earn by working, as the Financial Aid program poorly reflects students' realities.»

Saguenay, it would have to be \$18.11. Since students spend the major part of their income on rent, on school-related fees (tuition,

textbooks, etc.) and in transportation, they have very little remaining financial leeway.

These financial issues go beyond what a student may earn by working, as the Financial Aid program poorly reflects students' realities. The criteria with which Financial Aid is calculated are remarkably arbitrary: since parental income is factored into the calculation for loans and bursaries, a student in a state of financial insecurity can see the amount of funding reduced. Furthermore, since the loans and bursaries program primarily offers loans, 96.5% of its recipients are in debt specifically because of their studies⁴. Being in debt forces students to make choices regarding their education. Predictably, students who are in a more precarious situation will tend to study in programs that lead primarily towards a well-paying job. Student debt therefore reinforces the adaptation of the education system to labour market requirements and favours private

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sector interference in postsecondary education programs.

Another student preoccupation that contributes to this state of precariousness concerns unpaid internships in certain fields. The time and effort supplied by an intern is comparable to what's asked of paid workers. Worse still, since these internships are required in order to get a degree, interns still have to pay tuition fees. It's important to note that unpaid internships are particularly prevalent in fields primarily occupied by women, such as psychology and education, as opposed to fields such as engineering, where a majority of students are men and where internships tend to be paid⁵.

It's necessary to highlight the fact that student precariousness doesn't only mean reduced financial security, but also a social precariousness: reduced access to the education of our choosing, having to make difficult decisions about one's future, and having to prioritize some expenses over others are all social consequences of the insecurity that affects students. In some cases, these situations can mean high levels of stress, and the academic demands from the education system are some of the main factors explaining the increase in mental health consultations and the increased prevalence of anxiety disorders among students.

***«This is why at ASSÉ,
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This is why at ASSÉ, we're asking the following question: what if we, together, brought an end to student precariousness? Other student issues deserve attention and will be addressed over the following pages. Precariousness affects all of us, as students, it affects our material conditions, in our everyday lives, and we must stand in solidarity with all those who are confronted with this reality, both students and non-students. Access to post-secondary education is in play, and the mobilization against precariousness directly concerns the redistribution of wealth at all levels of society.

We're sick of being poor!

- 1 INSTITUT DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUÉBEC (2016). « Travail et rémunération. Annuaire québécois des statistiques du travail : portrait des principaux indicateurs du marché et des conditions de travail, 2005-2015, Volume 12 », Gouvernement du Québec
- 2 SYNDICAT INDUSTRIEL DES TRAVAILLEURS ET DES TRAVAILLEUSES - INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD (2016). « Parlons-en du salaire minimum ! : une réticence quant à son augmentation », Syndicat industriel des travailleurs et des travailleuses - Industrial Workers of the World
- 3 INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE ET D'INFORMATIONS SOCIO-ECONOMIQUES (2016). « Les conditions d'un salaire minimum en 2016? », Institut de recherche et d'informations socio-économiques
- 4 MINISTÈRE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR, DE LA RECHERCHE ET DE LA SCIENCE (GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC) (2015). Enquête sur la condition de vie des étudiantes et des étudiants de la formation professionnelle, du collégial et de l'université, Québec, p.83.
- 5 ATTFIELD, James et Isabelle COUTURE (2014). An Investigation into the Status and Implications of Unpaid Internships in Ontario, Victoria, p.14.
- 6 FÉDÉRATION DES CÉGEPS (2015). « Mémoire de la Fédération des cégeps déposé dans le cadre de la consultation sur le renouvellement de la politique québécoise de la jeunesse », Fédération des cégeps

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TANNÉES
d'être
PAUVRES

Photo credit: François Desroches

STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS A TOOL FOR MOBILIZATION!

Mireille Allard, student in Natural Sciences

Do you want to DEFEND your rights?

Do you want to ACT politically?

Do you want to ORGANIZE actions?

Do you want to get INVOLVED?

A student association is, in a sense, a union for students, bringing together students from a given environment. It can be for Cégep, a University, or even a department or faculty. Its aim is to bring students together and to defend their interests, namely in political, environmental, social, cultural and academic affairs. It achieves these objectives namely by organizing events, by defending its members' rights in the face of their local administration or by undertaking social or political actions.

Student associations are built around the principle of direct democracy, which means that members are the ones in charge! Although an Executive Council or a Board of Directors may have some decision-making power, the General Assembly is the supreme body. In a General Assembly, every member has voting rights and it's this decision-making body that decides the association's policies and actions. The involvement and participation of as many students as possible is therefore essential, as these are the strengths of student associations! Decisions made collectively by a large amount of students from all walks of life are much more legitimate and representative than if they were made by only a handful of people.

Also, in order to lead victorious struggles, mass mobilization of the student population is required, as the mandates adopted by the G.A. only really take form when they're invested in by members of the association. In order to do so, several committees can lend support to the student association in the elaboration of its struggles. That's why on campus we can often find mobilization committees, women's committees, environmental committees, intercultural committees, newspaper committees, or committees that manage the student café. These committees are generally subsidized by the student association and often act in a complementary fashion. For example, the mobilization and newspaper committees can help inform members of the decisions made by the G.A. and of the actions undertaken by the student association, and the women's committee often collaborates with the association in order to advance feminist causes on campus.

«The involvement and participation of as many students as possible is therefore essential, as these are the strengths of student associations!»

In addition to the local struggles on campus, it was decided at the latest congress of the Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ) that this coming year's mobilization would be centered on the topic of student precariousness. The investment of student associations through the student population on every campus would be

an excellent way to channel our struggles in order to make gains in this campaign, at the local and national levels.

« A week of regional actions will take place in different regions in Quebec from October 17th to 23rd »

ASSÉ will also be organizing a training camp in Quebec City during the week-end of September 24th and 25th. It will include workshops on mobilization, feminism, antiracism, and student precariousness, and will also be an opportunity for student activists from all over Quebec to get to know each other! A feminist training camp will also take place over the weekend of October 22nd and 23rd, with workshops centered on feminist topics. Finally, a week of regional actions will take place in different regions in Quebec from October 17th to 23rd. This will be an opportunity for students from across the province to focus their energy in order to organize simultaneous actions in their region centered on their local struggles or on the national campaign on student precariousness.

Therefore, there are many ways to get involved in this struggle: by participating in your student association's General Assembly, by joining a committee or your association's Executive, or by taking part in the political actions, it's the mobilization effort from each and every one of us that will allow our future struggles to be victorious!

What is ASSÉ?

The Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ) is a national student union bringing together close to 70 000 members from over 40 Cégep and University level associations. Although we usually think of unions as defending workers, ASSÉ is truly a union aimed at defending the interests of students in Quebec. ASSÉ is dedicated to informing and mobilizing its members and namely fights for increased access to education.

For the right to education

Education is a basic right and not a mere commodity. All of ASSÉ's struggles reflect among other things the desire that all citizens of Quebec have access to free, public, accessible, secular and quality education, free of any discrimination. It's in that sense that ASSÉ's members constantly fight to eliminate the economic barriers that the government imposes on our Cégeps and Universities.

For a combative and democratic unionism

It's important to remain coherent between our principles and our actions: progressive and democratic demands require a progressive and democratic action strategy. In Quebec, like everywhere else, it's through campaigns led by combative movements based on mobilization and mass action that the most important social programs were obtained. This is why we can call this type of action combative student unionism.

This requires first the development of dynamic and democratic union practices. In that sense, we must create space for debates, collectively elaborate our analyses, not shy away from confronting ideas, and, above all, allow for students to make decisions collectively. The General Assembly – a decision-making body open to all members of a given association – allows for the expression of this combative democratic culture.

The decisions made in Congress – ASSÉ's supreme decision-making body – stem from decisions made by the different member associations. These associations remain autonomous at all times. Democracy, autonomy, and combativeness guide ASSÉ's members in their actions.



THE STRUCTURAL MAGNETISM OF CITIES

Guillaume Proulx and Valérie Plante Lévesque, students in Geography

Deciding to undertake post-secondary education either at the Cégep or University level inevitably means making important decisions. Aside from choosing their program, students have to decide which school they want to attend. Although some students prefer to study at a Cégep or University close to home, others choose to move to a city.

Not every student has the option of moving in order to pursue their education as this leads to financial precariousness. Some must therefore give up their plan to study in the field of their choice in order to study in a program that's given close to home or that leads directly to a job. On the other hand, these education migrants rely on Financial Aid in a much higher proportion than those who remain in their home region¹. This situation, coupled with the lack of integration in their new environment, is common, since students must adapt to the pressure brought on by their new realities.

«Some must therefore give up their plan to study in the field of their choice in order to study in a program that's given close to home or that leads directly to a job. »

Despite the fact that the province of Quebec counts over 30 Cégeps in regions outside of Montreal and Quebec City, these two urban centers remain the primary choice for young students. Today, in urban Cégeps, one in five students initially lived over 80km away². If the absence of a given program in one's home region largely explains why students choose to move, the allure of new experiences also pushes them to leave home and go somewhere new.

Territorial equality and program marketing

The emigration of young people from regions towards urban centers is nothing new. In fact, urban settings have been attracting people looking to experience an environment where a wide variety of jobs and services are concentrated for generations. It's also in the regional urban settings that postsecondary education establishments have been established since the creation of the Cégep and University of Quebec networks at the end of the 1960s. At around this time, the provincial government was mandated to reduce regional inequalities regarding access to education by creating a postsecondary network that would offer similar programs

throughout Quebec. This new structure would allow young people to receive quality education while remaining close to home.

The programs offered by these educational establishments have evolved quite a bit since their creation. Cégep and University campuses have undergone several structural and financial reforms, forcing them to abandon their principle objective in order to attract new students by specializing their offer of programs. This is why many programs are offered exclusively in specific towns or cities, as a way to encourage mobility. Since cities have more educational institutions, they inevitably offer more choice.

«On the other hand, these education migrants rely on Financial Aid in a much higher proportion than those who remain in their home region¹.»

A planned migration

The reality that's affecting the postsecondary education networks reflects a more profound transformation of the economy. The defunct model of the consumer economy allowed for the creation of the Cégep and University of Quebec networks. The Quebec welfare state sought to ensure that the entire population would have the means to consume, in order to support industrial production. To do so, the provincial government massively invested in the infrastructure and economy of all the regions in Quebec in order to develop the inhabited territory, with the belief that by improving the living conditions of the entire population, people would increase their spending and therefore stimulate economic growth.

However, since the beginning of the 1980s, the dominant economic model switched to neoliberalism, which led to many territorial transformations. Instead of stimulating consumerism, the government sought to stimulate private-sector initiatives by deregulating the economy and privatizing the State. This model no longer saw

postsecondary institutions as a means of local development through the jobs that they create and the training and education they supply, but rather as mere expenses. The State is not only divesting from the education system (budget cuts, adapting to private sector demands), but also from territorial development itself, pushing the regions of Quebec to compete amongst themselves in order to attract investors, workers, students, etc. Since cities have historically been where financial resources, services and people are concentrated, they're getting the better end of the deal since the other regions must innovate in order to maintain their economic vitality.

«Cégep and University campuses have undergone several structural and financial reforms, forcing them to abandon their principle objective in order to attract new students by specializing their offer of programs.»

So it's unsurprising that students, hungry for adventure and new experiences, would choose to settle in an environment rich with cultural, economic, and social attractions. However, what we know of interregional migration in Quebec shows that young people who moved away for school tend in large parts to settle back at home when they get their degree³. The emancipatory impression offered by the city seems to wear off after some time.

1 RICHARD, Éric et MARESCHAL, Julie. 2013, Les défis d'étudier loin de chez soi : regards sur le parcours et l'intégration des migrants pour études. Rapport de recherche PAREA. Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures/Québec, Campus Notre-Dame-de-Foy et Cégep Garneau.

2 Ibid

3 UNITÉ DE TRAVAIL POUR L'IMPLANTATION DE LOGEMENT ÉTUDIANT (UTILE). Mémoire déposé le 28 août 2013. Étudier à Montréal : Une vision à étoffer, Présenté dans le cadre des consultations publiques sur le Plan de développement de Montréal,

A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF THE STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Kathy Teasdale, Student in Feminist Studies

Although motherhood is often idealized and represented in the public imagination as the ultimate purpose of being a woman, financial support allocated to mothers when they're in school is enough to make them regret their decision to pursue their education. The Financial Assistance Program is an outdated system that reinforces women's dependency to men, even more so when it comes to student mothers.

The greatest obstacles facing students for accessing loans and bursaries are the criteria regarding autonomy. If they're not met, the student's parental income determines the amount that is allocated. Among these criteria are namely: being the biological or adoptive parent of a child, being at least 20 weeks pregnant, living in a conjugal relationship, and living with at least one child¹. Meeting these criteria offers the possibility of receiving a much higher amount of financial assistance since parental income is no longer considered. By presenting this conservative vision of family structure as the quickest way of obtaining financial independence in the eyes of the Student Financial Assistance Program, women must trade in their bodies and means of reproduction in order to receive a higher amount of money. In other words, the focus is placed on the couple as a finality and on the nuclear family as a norm, which has the effect of inciting women to get married or, in some cases, accelerate their plans to have children.

«For students, having children means having to pay more in rent for a bigger apartment and in expenses such as diapers and clothes.»

Balancing family and studies

Among all the recipients of Student Financial Assistance, 39 060 are have at least one child under their care². Additional funds can be allocated for living expenses. The maximum amount is of \$252 per month for every dependent³. This is far from being enough to cover a child's basic needs. For students, having children means having to pay more in rent for a bigger apartment and in

expenses such as diapers and clothes. And aside from the exorbitant cost of daycare, parents have to ensure that the daycare center's schedule matches their own. These parental and financial responsibilities reduce the ability of parents to undertake full-time studies, making part-time education the only realistic avenue for higher education.

« The focus is placed on the couple as a finality and on the nuclear family as a norm, which has the effect of inciting women to get married or, in some cases, accelerate their plans to have children.»

The issue of juggling family and studies particularly affects women as they represent 69.9% of student parents⁴. When these student mothers live with their spouse, they receive additional funding in order to cover the expenses mentioned earlier, and also receive help in the form of sharing parental responsibilities. Although this allows for the student mother to concentrate on her studies, these advantages come at the cost of finding themselves in a state of dependency with the spouse in order to maintain adequate living conditions. Single mothers, on the other hand, don't have this additional funding. Unfortunately for them, they have few options when it comes to escaping this state of precariousness, since the financial assistance calculations take alimony into account if it's higher than \$1200⁵. According to a study by the Institut de recherche en études féministes (IREF)⁶, of the 572 mothers who responded, 57.9% of them considered themselves to be in a state of precariousness. This proportion rises to 75.7% for single mothers.

«The current Student Financial Aid Program falls short in its objective of encouraging access to postsecondary education for mothers who wish to pursue or return to higher education.»

In short, the current Student Financial Aid Program falls short in its objective of encouraging access to postsecondary education for mothers who wish to pursue or return to higher education. Although the indexation of financial aid to increased living expenses is irregular, the cost of groceries and housing, on the other hand, is constantly rising. This disparity affects all students, but it affects student mothers in particular. It's time we demanded that the Student Financial Aid Program be reformed, namely by increasing the amount allocated in bursaries so that it reaches the low-income cut-off without increasing student debt.

1 Gouvernement du Québec, « Catégorie d'étudiants », 2016

2 Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur, de la Recherche et de la Science, « Aide financière aux études, Statistique, Rapport 2013-2014 », 2015

3 Gouvernement du Québec, « Règlement sur l'aide financière aux études », juin 2016

4 Association de Parents étudiant ou travaillant à l'Université Laval, « Quelques statistiques intéressantes sur les parents-étudiants »

5 Idem 3

6 Christine Corbeil et coll. « Parents-étudiants de l'UQAM, Réalités, besoins et ressources », janvier 2011



Photo credit François Desroches

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE PRECARIOUS

I'm 22 years old and I'm an undergraduate student in Preschool and Primary Education Sciences. This fall, I'll be starting my fourth and final year of undergrad, which includes the final internship, meaning that I'll be taking on all of a teacher's workload for 70 days; preparing class material, teaching, organizing field trips and attending meetings.

«Since a single job wasn't enough to pay the bills, I sometimes had to have up to four jobs at the same time.»

Since I began of my degree, I've been living in an apartment and have had to support myself without any outside help. My parents are separated and I have a little sister who has Down syndrome, so my parents can't help me with my tuition or my living expenses. My parents didn't finish high school, and they themselves have difficulty finding a stable. Sometimes, I even have to help them out by covering some of their own expenses, either

for my little sister or for themselves (rent, car repair, etc.). So, not only am I financially precarious, but so are my parents, and I have to help them despite my own situation.

In order to pay my rent, my bills, and my tuition, I get loans from the Financial Aid program. However, since the provincial loans program only covers tuition, I had to get a part time job in addition to my studies. During my two years at Cégep and my first three years of University, I worked an average of 25 to 35 hours a week, and between 40 and 60 hours a week over the summer. My summer jobs were done in addition to my summer classes and in sometimes harsh conditions. Since a single job wasn't enough to pay the bills, I sometimes had to have up to four jobs at the same time. The combination of work, school, volunteering, as well as maintaining a "stable" social and family life made my educational experience rather chaotic.

The final teaching internship will force me to slow down the pace. I won't be able to work as many hours outside of my internship without compromising my academic success or driving myself to physical and mental

exhaustion. I'm expecting to spend 40 hours a week in the classroom teaching, about 15 to 20 hours a week outside of school to prepare the material and grade homework, and at least another 5 a week hours for preparing field trips and attending meetings.

On top of all that are another 12 hours of paid work per week, which is barely enough to pay my monthly bills (telephone, transportation, and rent). This is why I've had to work over 40 hours a week over the summer, otherwise I'm unable to cover for school supplies, groceries, and other internship-related expenses. I'm fully aware that my decision to continue working during my internship will impact my performance and my grades, and I've already discussed this with my supervisor, who's sympathetic to my plight. But she's made it very clear: working over six hours a week outside of my internship will seriously compromise my chances of success, as was the case with the intern she had last year.

When I see how precarious teaching jobs are, I can only hope that all the sacrifices I've made are worth it.

ASSÉ'S 15 YEARS: REVIEW AND PERSPECTIVES

Emmanuel J. Guay, student in sociology

Founded in February 2001 in Sherbrooke, the Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ) initially brought together a dozen Cégep and University level student associations with the desire to renew the student movement's combative tradition. Through its far-reaching demands and combative strategy, ASSÉ has succeeded over the years in rallying an ever-increasing number of members and in becoming an important vector of political mobilization.

Born in the midst of the anti-globalization mobilization in the early 2000s, ASSÉ participated in a continental strike against the Free Trade Area of the Americas in October 2002 and against the war in Iraq in 2003. However, the first general unlimited strike in which ASSÉ participated was in 2005, after the Charest government announced its intention to convert 103 million dollars from bursaries from the Financial Aid Program into loans. The Coalition de l'ASSÉ élargie (CASSÉÉ) was then formed by the members of ASSÉ and several unaffiliated associations in order to coordinate the general strike campaign. This strike resulted in a partial success, with the government retreating from its plan to cut in the Financial Aid Program. The following year, ASSÉ launched a campaign demanding free tuition at every level of the education system and maintained pressure on the government in that sense.

Since 2010, ASSÉ began a mobilization campaign in opposition to the Charest government's plan to increase tuition fees by 75%, which two years later led to the longest student strike in Quebec's history. Led by the Coalition large de l'ASSÉ (CLASSE), this strike would

ultimately trigger provincial elections as well as the cancellation of the proposed tuition hike. Although the newly-formed Marois government would begin indexing tuition fees a few months later, the major part of the hike was blocked thanks to the struggles of the associations revolving around CLASSE.

Following a mobilization cycle over the course of 2015 which did not meet its objectives – being the cancellation of the Couillard government's austerity policies, massive reinvestment in public services, and a moratorium on hydrocarbon exploitation in Quebec – ASSÉ is at a crossroads. An Orientation Congress will be held this fall to that end. It'll be centered on the topics of direct democracy, of inclusion, of the centralization of power, of montrealcentrism, the revision of the committees' and councils' mandates, of ASSÉ's policies, of antiracist, queer and feminist practice and discourse, as well as the radicalization of environmental activism. Member associations are invited to come together and share their perspectives and strategies in light of recent events and of the struggles to come.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION: INDIVIDUAL ACTION OR SOCIAL ISSUE?

Hind Fazazi, Student in Philosophy
Myriam Ennajimi, Student in Biology

The issue of cultural appropriation is currently the subject of a great deal of debate and discussion, particularly on the different practices to which it refers and on how to tackle this form of colonialism. We'd like to state in advance that our intention is not to give the impression that there's one definite answer to these questions, but rather to help demystify this notion by contributing to the reflection surrounding it.

How do we define cultural appropriation? Let's take yoga for example. Does someone who practices yoga directly or indirectly cause prejudice to a marginalized group through the recuperation of this practice, or by helping multinationals profit from it? On the other hand, should we expect white people who practice yoga to know its origins, history, and appropriation, and expect that they obtained the consent of the community from which the practice originates? Usually, the answer is "Sure, it's the least they can do" or "No, this person isn't Hindu and they don't have the right to indulge in this practice as they would some commodity, particularly if it means drawing profit from it".

«First, the fact that History isn't neutral, but rather written by the colonial settler. Taking an interest in a symbol's history means taking an interest in what was erased by Western colonialism.»

Some forms of cultural appropriation are spiritual or cultural in nature, such as wearing a bindi or henna at a music festival, and others are more economical. A second example is Urban Outfitters, a store that uses Navajo patterns on their clothes and reaps huge profits at the expense of a marginalized community that receives no economic benefits. Some groups do appropriate "culture" (traditions, sacred rites, objects, etc.) but also goods and profits, and it's an example of contemporary capitalist colonialism. To this, people often answer with the following argument: "To whom do these cultures belong? Isn't culture fluid? Isn't cultural exchange possible?". This kind of exchange is impossible when there's dissymmetry in the power relationship between cultures. For example, even if white people are attached to an

interesting cultural symbol, that doesn't make wearing it a sign of solidarity or of international cultural sharing. It would also be inappropriate to say that African populations have appropriated the wearing of jeans: this practice was imposed by colonial settlers with the objective of assimilating local slave populations. Western culture can't be appropriated because it's the dominant culture.



Photo credit: Jere Keys on Flickr

We believe that the popular literature as well as the usual method of analysis regarding cultural appropriation are the result of a profoundly individualistic (or "case by case") approach, stemming from outrage that is legitimate but also sometimes rushed and sterile. If we don't go beyond calling out people who are either unaware of their privileges or who are false allies, what do we gain as groups? A more systemic approach would, on the other hand, allow for a more profound reflection that may lead to collective action that integrates an understanding of systems of oppression. Therefore, it's possible to struggle against the harmful intersection of

colonialism and capitalism. To us, this seems more promising in terms of reflection and action than simply criticizing microaggressions (which are, of course, painful...), which is based on the analysis of each and every symbol or practice one after the other.

Yes, our outrage is legitimate, but we must avoid the dead-end that is mere anger against the colonial system. Empowerment won't come from white people, although we may ask for support and solidarity from our allies, instead we must count on ourselves so that marginalized communities may reappropriate their symbols, practices, the economic benefits of the practical knowledge that was stolen and used by western capitalism, as well as the political capacity to organize and obtain these gains.

Golden rules for white allies

In short, there are a few golden rules that white people should keep in mind. First, the fact that History isn't neutral, but rather written by the colonial settler. Taking an interest in a symbol's history means taking an interest in what was erased by Western colonialism. Also, since the risk of offending people is very high, we recommend avoiding that which is sacred or religious. Finally, it's important to always consider your own privileges when using a symbol from a different culture. For example, a white woman wearing a sari for its beauty must be aware of the fact that she'll be looked at differently than a woman of Indian descent who will instead be confronted by racism and prejudice for wearing her traditional dress.

What is cultural appropriation?

Highly topical issue, cultural appropriation is the subject of much debate in several spaces, namely activist circles. Several definitions exist, but here's one in particular: [...] Cultural appropriation is when a person adopts aspects of a cultural that is not their own. But that is only the basic definition. A deeper understanding of cultural appropriation refers to power dynamics in which members of a dominant culture take elements from another culture that has been systemically oppressed by the dominant group.¹ »

1 JOHNSON, Maisha Z., « Qu'est-ce qu'il y a de mal dans l'appropriation culturelle? Ces 9 réponses révèlent pourquoi c'est blessant. », L'Écho des sorcières, juillet 2015

Yoga

Originating in India around 2000 years B.C.E., yoga is considered today to be a very widespread sport in the Western world. Yoga classes, mats, and other by-products, books written by people in North America... the commercial image of yoga is very different from its original meaning.

Frosh and initiations

RAPE CULTURE AND HOW TO AVOID IT

José-Frédérique Biron, étudiante sciences politiques

The beginning of the school year is a great opportunity to meet people in parties and frosh events for new students. Although this should be a moment for celebration, camaraderie, and new friendships, these events are marked with signs of rape culture.

You need only think of the bawdy songs, the sexually suggestive challenges that can embarrass or humiliate new students, the position of social authority of the initiators who are often men, and of the consumption of drugs and alcohol that have disinhibiting effects, making people more susceptible to being abused. You may also think of the absence of people on hand to ensure the integrity of attendees and arrive at the conclusion that these events are moments where sexual assault can take place¹.

What is rape culture?

Rape culture can be understood as the cultural aspect of sexual violence. It refers to sexually suggestive jokes and micro-aggressions experienced by women as well as to rape and sexual touching. It also refers to the attitudes, behaviours and discourse that either excuse, trivialize, or justify rape and the other forms of sexual assault previously mentioned.

Rape culture tends to cast blame on the victim for having been raped or sexually assaulted rather than blame the perpetrator. This results in impunity for the perpetrators at the expense of the survivors' physical, moral, and psychological integrity. This tendency towards victim blaming can be seen when one asks a victim what she was wearing at the time of her assault, if she drank alcohol or took drugs or if she had acted in such a way as to give the impression that she desired sexual contact with the perpetrator.

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Another fundamental characteristic of rape culture is that the will and consent of the victims of sexual assault is overlooked. In popular culture, the impressions that we have of men and women differ from each other and lend support to this problem. Men are often described as being masculine, which refers to assertiveness, domination, and violence, while women are described as being passive or are seen as inanimate objects lacking free will and onto whom men may assert their desires and fantasies with impunity.



Photo credit: Élisabeth Béfort-Doucet

How to avoid contributing to the proliferation of rape culture in student spaces?

Student spaces aren't apart from the rest of society, and rape culture is as much a part of them as anywhere else. In the United States, a recent study showed that women who have just begun their postsecondary education are the most likely to be sexually assaulted², and that this situation is probably similar in Canada. It therefore appears essential to carry out prevention work with students, particularly with men, since the vast majority of sexual assaults are perpetrated by men onto women. In Quebec, on a vast majority of University campuses, a campaign called "Sans oui, c'est non"³ is currently underway. This campaign puts a lot of

emphasis on the notion of consent, one of the solutions to the problem of rape culture. Consent must be explicit, enthusiastic, and informed, which means that it must not be muddled by intoxication.

In order to abolish rape culture, we must also address gendered representations of men and women. The masculinity as represented

«Consent must be explicit, enthusiastic, and informed, which means that it must not be muddled by intoxication.»

in popular culture of an aggressive or even violent attitude in men, is toxic. Most victims are assaulted by men that they know and trust, and these men abuse of that trust and eliminate any equality between the two people, regardless of the nature of the relationship between them. In order to maintain egalitarian relationships, we must bring an end to these harmful representations.

In practical terms, the women's committees and Executive Councils of student associations can raise awareness among the people supervising these frosh events and encourage them to recognize signs of rape culture, to avoid them, and to respond to them. Furthermore, initiators or a consent squad can regularly remind people that the goal of the initiations is to get to know each other in a fun and playful setting and not in a degrading one, and that new students must at all time feel free to refuse to do something that would embarrass or humiliate them. Mobilization material on consent can be put up on the walls of the educational establishment. Finally, a drive-home service by the local women's committee could be offered during parties with lots of drinking so that people don't end up in a situation where they're too intoxicated to give consent.

1 IMPACT CAMPUS. Culture du viol : Initiations à caractère sexuel [En ligne]
<http://impactcampus.ca/actualites/culture-du-viol-initiations-a-caractere-sexuel/>

2 CAMPUS SAFETY. Sexual assault statistics
<http://www.campusafetymagazine.com/article/Sexual-Assault-Statistics-and-Myths>

3 CAMPAGNE SANS OUI, C'EST NON [En ligne]
<http://www.harcelementsexuel.ca>