



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on August 21, 2020

## Netflix Faces Backlash Over Soon-to-be-Released Film Sexualizing 11-year-old Girls

Netflix is facing backlash from users angered by the company's willingness to sexualize young children by streaming the controversial French film *Cuties*, which focuses on an 11-year-old girl who joins a "twerking" dance group.

According to *The Guardian*, *Cuties* follows 11-year-old Aminata "Amy," a Senegalese Muslim living in France who is struggling to choose between her background's traditional values and a group of rebellious young girls in a dance troupe. The film won a jury award for directing at the Sundance Film Festival this year, the *Los Angeles Times* reports, and is described as a "coming of age" story from the unique, unrepresented narrator.



Even before the film's release on Netflix, however, the streaming platform has found itself in hot water over the promotional materials, which have been criticized for being overtly sexual. The poster, dropped ahead of the film's September 9 Netflix release, features several young girls from the film baring their legs and midriffs and posed in sexual dance positions.

Social-media users have also criticized the trailer, which reveals scenes from the film wherein the young girls are performing overtly sexual dance routines and make themselves up to look older through clothing and makeup. Based on the brief trailer, it's evident that the young girls whom Amy befriends exude sexuality in the way dress, walk, and conduct themselves. They are 11 years old.

"Parents [and] carers need vigilance in protecting children from sexualisation," journalist Sonia Poulton wrote on [Twitter](#). "Every day brings a new Hell. Today's low is 'Cuties' on Netflix. A twerking mess that has 11-year-old girls grinding like pros. Another consequence of strippers becoming pop stars [and] influencing our young."

Scottish author Claire Heuchan noted the racist undertones behind the platform's actions. "It is so revealing that the first major Netflix original to centre young Black girls hinges on explicitly sexualising 11 year old children," Heuchan wrote on [Twitter](#). "Whether it's acting or music, a sexualised image is too often the price of mainstream success for Black women [and] girls. Disgraceful."

Online campaigns against the film are accusing the platform of sexualizing young girls "for the viewing pleasure of pedophiles." One Change.org petitions reads,

This movie/show is disgusting as it sexualizes an ELEVEN year old for the viewing pleasure of pedophiles and also negatively influences our children! There is no need for this kind of content in that age group, especially when sex trafficking and pedophilia are so rampant! There is no excuse,



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this is dangerous content!

That [petition](#) has more than 175,000 signatures.

A second Change.org [petition](#) has nearly 50,000 signatures. And there are nearly 100 other petitions on the same site, all for the same purpose.

The backlash prompted Netflix to issue a statement of apology on Thursday morning: “We’re deeply sorry for the inappropriate artwork that we used for Mignonnes/Cuties,” Netflix said in a statement Thursday morning. “It was not OK, nor was it representative of this French film which won an award at Sundance. We’ve now updated the pictures and description.”

But as noted by PopCulture.com, the apology did little to assuage concerned users, who took to social media to begrudge what they’ve dubbed “soft core pedo porn.”

“It’s not just the artwork,” tweeted @Doonishsan in response to Netflix’s tweeted apology. “The whole movie is not ok. Cancel it. Put it in the trash.”

Another user screenshot a particularly disturbing image from the film in which one of the dancers is outside touching her chest presumably in search of her blossoming bosoms while another girl has her finger sensually in her mouth. Three of the four girls in the photo are bearing their midriffs.

“There is zero context that will make this okay,” @NotJosieGrossy tweeted.

Even in the absence of the overtly sexual poster, however, the film’s themes, which include the examination of the sexualization of young girls, are troublesome. Writing for In Their Own League, film critic Caz Armstrong observes,

The film explores how pre-teen girls understand (or don’t) society’s sexualisation of them. The film is from their perspective and is steeped in their naïveté. They want to emulate older women who are popular, famous and rich. But there’s so much they don’t understand about their behaviours and why they’re dangerous and inappropriate.

The way this copy-cat behaviour is shown in the film does admittedly get very uncomfortable to watch at times, arguably overstepping the mark particularly in the dance scenes. The audience is confronted by sexualised dance moves from 11-year old characters and we are forced to consider a world which encourages women and girls to act in that way.

However, Armstrong goes on to say that the film does not celebrate or promote that behavior and that viewers are meant to be “appalled.” This sentiment is depicted in the characters on screen who are witnessing the behavior and are also uncomfortable with it.

Armstrong contends Netflix deliberately seized on the most controversial aspects of the film in its marketing materials. “They’re doing exactly what the film itself puts under the microscope, sexually exploiting girls without the mature discussion required. It’s clickbait,” Armstrong opines.

Ultimately, Armstrong implores viewers not to allow Netflix’s actions to sabotage the success of the film, which marks the directorial debut of writer/director Maimouna Doucoure. Armstrong argues the film is not pedophilic, despite the marketing around it, and that it was an opportunity for discourse around girls’ childhood that contains rich, relatable themes.

But for many viewers, it seems wholly unnecessary to examine an 11-year-old’s exploration and understanding of her sexuality. It does not seem appropriate for such adult themes to revolve around pre-pubescent characters, and stories like these feed the narrative that young girls are more sexual



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than we care to admit. It is the stuff of pedophilic dreams.

One Twitter user defended the film in much the same way as Armstrong.

“The film is ABOUT the exploitation and sexualization of kids. It is the theme!” wrote @ BoudPrototype.

But @ClaudeSpeed noted the absurdity of that argument. “So they sexualize kids? Weird.”

Image: [Screenshot from official movie trailer for Cuties on YouTube](#)



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