The Sexualization of Girls
Lisa Suzuki, PhD., Emma Canny, Marissa Oliveri
New York University
What Is Sexualization?

According to the American Psychological Association (2010), sexualization occurs when:

- A person’s value comes only from his/her sexual appeal or behavior.
- A person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness with being sexy.
- A person is sexually objectified.
- Sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person.
What Causes This?
What Causes This?

We will be covering various influences on girls that lead to their sexualization:

- Music
- Movies/Television
- Video Games
- Advertisements
- Toys
- Clothing
- Impact of Mothers
Music

* Lyrics in pop/hip-hop music

* 2012 study by Hall, West, & Hill examined lyrics of popular music from 1959-2009
  * 14.3% of popular songs in 2009 by female artists had sexualized lyrics
  * 32.1% of popular songs in 2009 by male artists lyrics had sexualized lyrics

* Objectification of women in music videos
  * According to the APA (2010), 50% of music videos depict a sexualized image of a woman
Movies/Television

(APA, 2010)

- TV shows and movies aimed at children and adolescents are predominantly male.
- Additionally, female characters are more likely to be dressed provocatively and be physically attractive.
- Women on prime-time television are often objectified, with 85% of sexually objectifying comments being directed at women from men.
Geena Davis Institute Study (2013)

* Analyzed 120 films from industry-leading nations, including the United States, looking at the portrayal of women.
  * Women in movies are 5 times more likely to have looks commented on
  * 29% of women in American films wore provocative clothes
  * There were an equal number of sexualized images of teen girls as there were adult women
  * Only 25% of characters with jobs were women, though women make up 40% of the workforce worldwide.
“Wholesome to Whoresome”

Cinderella Ate My Daughter (2011) by Peggy Orenstein

- The media portrays young female child stars as wholesome
- These stars demonstrate maturity by sexualizing themselves
- “The virgin/whore cycle of the pop princesses” (p. 130)
Miley Cyrus
Kylie Jenner
Ariana Grande
**Video Games**


- 46-70% of female characters in video games are depicted with abundant cleavage
- 86% of female characters were portrayed wearing clothing with low/revealing necklines
  - Females were twice as likely as males to be shown wearing revealing clothing
- Majority of female characters are non-playable
Female participants

2 different versions of the main character, 1 was sexualized and 1 was not

Participants who played the sexualized character reported less favorable attitudes towards women and lower self-efficacy.
Advertisements
(Graff, K.A., Munen, S.K., Krause, A.K., 2013)

* 51.8% of the advertisements magazines depicted women as sex objects

* Seventeen and Girl's Life study
  * The average number of sexualizing characteristics in Seventeen tripled over three decades.
  * 15 times the number of sexualizing characteristics in Girl's Life today from when it was first published in the 1990s.
Toys

- Progression of dolls over the years
- Study about Sexualized Dolls
  - Girls identify with doll that is more sexualized
Clothes

- 30% of clothes geared towards pre-teen girls are sexualized (Graff, Murnen, & Krause, 2013)
- Abercrombie & Fitch
- Disney “Dive In” Underwear
- Victoria's Secret “Tween Line”
- Halloween Costumes
Impact of Mothers

- Daughters respond more positively to images of sexually objectified women if their mother has a poor self image
- Mothers who are more religious have daughters who are 74% less likely to play with a sexy doll
- Mother’s opinion about her own body impacts her daughter’s perceived importance on body image
Effects on Girls
Academic Effects
Participants were 91 girls, ages 10-14, from the southwestern U.S.

They were given a measure of how important being sexually attractive was to their identity.

The more importance they placed on being sexually attractive, the lower their grades in Social Studies, English, and Science; and the lower their test scores were in reading and math.
Newscast Study
McKenney, S.J. and Bigler, R.S. (2014)

* Had girls do a mock newscast, which triggers concerns about both competence and appearance.

* Preparation and newscast videos were viewed by researchers and coded for focus on appearance and competence.

* Higher importance on sexual attractiveness were associated with a lower focus on competence and greater focus on appearance, specifically applying makeup.
Emotional Effects

* Girls and women who are more exposed to sexualized images are more likely to self-monitor their appearance.

* At least 60 studies have shown that strong appearance anxiety and disgust are associated with self-monitoring of appearance.

* 15% increase in teen invasive cosmetic surgery from 2000-2005

* 7% increase in minimally invasive procedures (i.e. Botox)
Social Effects

Graff, Murnen, & Smolak (2012)

- Girls and women who are sexualized are less likely to be seen as capable
- Sexualization of girls also leads to increased objectification and sexual violence
Implication for School Counselors
What Can School Counselors Do?

- Combat sexualized media messages
- Build positive self-image for girls
- Work with boys to resist social impact of sexualization
- Engage in social advocacy
Combat Media Messages

- Media literacy lessons
- Boys and girls
Building Positive Self-Image

* Individual Counseling
  * Using cognitive-behavioral therapy to help girls change their negative self-concept
* Girl-to-Girl Mentoring
  * Girl Talk
* Go Grrrls
“Go Grrrls” Small Counseling Group

- This program significantly, positively impacts self-efficacy, body image, attitude toward attractiveness, and assertiveness.

- Evaluated through a study of 59 girls with an average age of 13.5.

- Small counseling group consisting of six units:
  - Being a girl in today’s society
  - Establishing a positive self-image
  - Establishing independence
  - Making and keeping friends
  - What to do when overwhelmed
  - Planning for the future
Social Advocacy

* Being aware of language
* Educating ourselves
* Being mindful of and taking action against inappropriate sexual remarks towards female students
  * Encouraging girls to go into STEM fields
  * Highlighting girls’ sports equally as much as boys’ sports
* Remember, averages are not predictive of what an individual can achieve!
Resources for School Counselors


* Information on Go Grrrls:
  
  * Overview of Program: http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=277
  

* Ten Websites to Help Empower Girls: http://www.sheheroes.org/2011/02/10-websites-we-love-that-are-helping-empower-girls/

* Girl Talk Mentoring Program: http://www.mygirltalk.org/
What have you tried?


