THE SEXUALIZATION OF GIRLS: AN UPDATE

CULTURE REFRAMED

The Sexualization of Girls: An Update

CONTENTS

Background
The American Psychological Association's Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls published its report in 2007. It brought an empirical focus to what had already become a national conversation and remains the most downloaded report on the APA website. The report defined sexualization thus: "A person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics; a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy; a person is sexually objectified—that is, made into a thing for others' sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person." This update summarizes research since the publication of the report.

Evidence for Continued Sexualization of Girls
Mainstream media and marketing efforts continue to disproportionately present adolescent girls and adult women in sexualized and objectified ways. This is true for television, movies, video games, music videos, lyrics, magazines, toys, Halloween costumes, sports media, and advertisements. When sexual themes are present in media, they are often accompanied by problematic attitudes toward girls and women. Still, adolescents continue to see the media as an important source of sexual information, even though research indicates that such information is sexist and lacks discussion of risk and responsibility.

Consequences
The consequences of exposure to sexualized media remain the same for adolescents and adult women. Sexualized media and marketing contribute to girls' self-sexualization, which contributes to others' objectifying them, and is correlated with higher self-surveillance and body shame. Exposure—sometimes even brief exposure—is associated with and can lead to sexist and stereotyped attitudes about women, greater objectification of women, and harmful beliefs about consent. A girl clad in sexy clothing may be seen by other girls as less smart, competent and moral. Yet a girl will choose a "sexy" look over a non-sexy one to depict her "ideal self." Exposure to sexualizing material continues to be related to feelings of shame, appearance anxiety, body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depressed mood. There is evidence that for some adolescents, exposure to sexualized media is associated with greater sexual activity, although those who are sexually active also seek out more sexualized media. There has also been support for increased tolerance of sexual violence following objectifying media exposure. This exposure has led to increased blaming of rape victims and decreased empathy for them.

Interventions
There is a scarcity of studies focusing on parental, educational, media, or school influences that counteract these effects. However, research studies and journalistic reports show that when girls are able to critically evaluate the media and are engaged in feminist activism, they combat the effects of hypersexualized media. Parental limit-setting of internet usage, progressive sex education, consciousness raising, and non-sexualized sports have all been suggested as antidotes. The new girl activism shows promise that girls themselves can lead a movement calling for more positive attitudes toward sexuality and sexually diverse media in their worlds.

Presence of Sexualization

The media that adolescents watch and listen to have been found to contain a high level of sexual content, as well as content that disproportionately depicts women as sexual objects (Collins, Martino, & Shaw, 2011; Wright, 2009).

57% of adolescents ages 14–16, identified media as an important source of sexual knowledge (Bleakley, Hennessy, Fishbein, Coles, & Jordan, 2009).

Portrayals of women on television as sexually objectified occurs in 45–50% of cases (Flynn et al., 2015; Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2012).

Sexualizing of content in children's TV programs averaged 24 incidents per program. Every episode had sexualizing content, 72% of which targeted female characters (McDade-Montez, Wallander, & Cameron, 2017).

Magazine advertisements featuring women as sexual objects are most common in men's magazines (76%), closely followed by 64% in adolescent girls' magazines and 56% in those intended for adult women (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008).

Prevalence of sexualization of girls in girls' magazines has increased over time (Graff, Murnen, & Krause, 2013).

Gender stereotypes in Halloween costumes, valentines, dolls, and action figures show that the most common cue for female-gendered characters was that the character was wearing revealing clothing. More than 50% of the female characters wore revealing clothing, while only 20% of the male characters did (Murnen, Greenfield, Younger, & Boyd, 2016).

In a study of 15 national stores, researchers found that almost 30% of the clothing items for pre-teen girls (represented on their websites) had sexualizing characteristics (Goodin, Van Denburg, Murnen, & Smolak, 2011).

Consequences of Sexualization

While girls say they enjoy engaging in self-sexualizing behavior, they also have reported experiencing higher levels of sexual objectification by others when they do (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2010).

Girls with higher levels of self-sexualization have been shown to have higher levels of body surveillance and body shame than those with low levels of internalized sexualization (McKenney & Bigler, 2016).

Frequent exposure to sexually objectifying media has been linked to higher self-sexual objectification in girls (Tiggemann & Slater, 2015).

In a Dutch longitudinal study, Peter and Valkenburg (2009) found that adolescents who were exposed to sexually explicit media were subsequently more likely to view women as sex objects.

Consumption of music videos has been linked to greater acceptance of harmful beliefs about sex and sex roles. This exposure has been specifically linked to believing that when women say "no" to sex, they really mean "yes" (Van Oosten, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2015).

Although many of the cited studies use college-student samples, a study of adolescents in Belgium that asked teens to play a video game with a sexualized female character later expressed more tolerance of rape myths and of sexual harassment than teens who played the same game with a non-sexualized character (Driesmans,Vandenbosch, & Eggermont, 2015).

Graff et al. (2013) found that when a fifth-grade girl was dressed in sexualizing clothing, she was seen as less intelligent, less competent, and less moral than when she was dressed in childlike clothing.

Adolescent girls with sexualized online profile pictures are regarded as less attractive and less competent by peers (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016).

Sexualization of female athletes has contributed to a devaluing of women's athletic abilities and disrespect for women among girls and young women (Daniels & Lavoi, 2013; Darvin & Sagas, 2017).

Teens who consume more sexualized media have lower expectations of contracting an STI or getting pregnant than teens who consume less (Martino et al., 2009; Ragsdale et al., 2013).

Boys' exposure to sexualizing magazines increased the importance they assigned to girls' body size and sexual body parts; it also made them more likely to endorse dating strategies that focus on appearance (Ward, Vandenbosch, & Eggermont, 2015).

In addition, studies that have been conducted with adults suggest that viewing sexually objectified women in media increased participants' support for sexist statements and traditional gender stereotypes (Kistler & Lee, 2009; Pennel & Behm-Morawitz, 2015), increased tolerance for sexual violence and harassment following objectifying media exposure (Aubrey, Hopper, & Mbure, 2011; Galdi, Maass, & Cadinu, 2014), and increased rape myth acceptance, victim blaming, and decreased empathy for victims in male participants (Beck et al., 2012; Fox et al., 2014; Loughnan et al., 2013; Romero-Sanchez et al., 2015).

Protections Against Sexualization

An authoritative parenting style in mothers, mothers who are less materialistic, and mothers who are more religious may help their daughters to be less affected by exposure to sexualizing material, or may prevent exposure (Starr & Ferguson, 2012).

Parental monitoring of internet use is related to less harassment online (Khurana, Bleakley, Jordan, & Romer, 2015).

General participation in extracurricular activities has not been found to contribute to or prevent self-objectification (Tiggemann & Slater, 2015).

Studies have shown that increased athletic participation is linked to increased self-esteem in girls and shifting body perceptions from appearance to physical ability (Varnes et al., 2013; Zurbriggen & Roberts, 2013).

Education can help to construct a more holistic understanding of healthy female sexuality and help girls navigate contradictory sexual messages (Allen, 2011; Fields, 2008; Gilbert, 2014; Lamb, 2010; Lamb, Roberts, & Plocha, 2016).

Girls may also benefit from monitoring their engagement and participation in media, paying attention to the way in which men and women are portrayed (Jackson & Vares, 2015).

Introduction

In 2007, the American Psychological Association's Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls published its report. It brought an empirical focus to what had already become a national conversation and remains the most downloaded report on the APA website. The Task Force first defined sexualization: "A person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics; a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy; a person is sexually objectified—that is, made into a thing for others' sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person" (APA, 2007). The Task Force then collected evidence, both anecdotal and empirical, of the sexualization of girls. Next, it looked at research that found consequences to girls, boys, and the general public. Finally, it made recommendations based on the available literature. One of the recommendations was for more empirical research, and this update—ten years later—shows how researchers heeded this call.

Criticism of the report came from those who believed that the focus on risk played into a moral panic about female sexuality in general and to those critics who wanted girls to be positioned as greater agents of their own sexual development. Critics wrote that the report did not say enough about girls of color or LGBT girls. Some critics pointed out that the report too often extrapolated from research on adults. Nevertheless, the report raised awareness around the sexualization of girls and girlhood and created a national conversation on the issue.

This update summarizes research published since the report was released, distinguishing between those studies that focus on adults or the typical sample of college students, and those studies that focus on children and adolescents. To the extent that we found it, we have also included research on the sexualization of boys or, rather, the effects of sexualization of the culture on both girls and boys.

Evidence for the Sexualization of Girls

This update first examines the evidence for the sexualization of girls that has been published since 2007. The majority of research has focused on the presence of sexual content in media, as well as sexualized material in media, television, movies, music videos and lyrics, advertising, sports media, and clothing. While the bulk of current research has focused on societal messages that come from media, it is important to note that the sexualization of girls is a broader cultural issue. Sexualization can occur through interpersonal relationships, including with family members (e.g., Starr & Ferguson, 2012) and peers (e.g., Petersen & Hyde, 2013). Girls continue to be judged by their sexuality (Valenti, 2010) and are increasingly presented in sexualized ways (Graff, Murnen, & Krause, 2013).

Media in General
Teens today spend approximately 9 to 11 hours a day using media (Common Sense Media, 2015; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010), and the material that adolescents consume to has been found to contain a high level of sexual content, as well as content that disproportionately depicts women as sexual objects—something that is generally referred to as "sexualizing" content (Collins, Martino, & Shaw, 2011; Wright, 2009). A study of adults shows that media continue to endorse a sexually objectified and unrealistically thin body ideal (Greenwood & Lippman, 2010). While adolescents consume, interact with, and make their own media, they are still shaped by and rely on mainstream media for messages about sex, gender roles, and relationships (Eyal & Ben-Ami, 2017; Hartley, Wight, & Hunt, 2014; Len-Ríos et al., 2016). One study found that 57% of adolescents ages 14–16 identified various media as important sources of sexual knowledge (Bleakley et al., 2009).

Television
Studies in the U.S. and other developed nations have shown that upward of 75% of television programming contains sexual content (Al-Sayed & Gunter, 2012; Eyal, Raz, & Levi, 2014). Sexual content may not be as problematic as sexualizing content (that is, the portrayal of women as sexual objects). Portrayals of women in television as sexually objectified occurs in 45–50% of cases, and these portrayals include body exposure that reflects cultural standards of beauty and thinness (Flynn et al., 2015; Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2012). In recent research on sexualization in children's TV programs, McDade-Montez, Wallander, and Cameron (2017) randomly sampled 32 episodes of 10 top programs (averaging 3 episodes per program) identified by white and Latina girls. Sexualizing content was present on an average of 24 incidents per program. Every episode had sexualizing content, 72% targeting female characters. White characters were sexualized more than Latina characters with regard to wearing heavy makeup or wearing sexualized clothing; but Latina characters were represented more in the categories of "wearing high heels" and "wearing revealing clothing." Some severe forms of sexualization that were looked for were not found (e.g., sexual aggression). But the coders did find in children's programing sexist comments, sexual harassment, attempts at manipulating a person into a romantic relationship, and unwanted sexual touching.

Movies
L. M. Ward and colleagues reviewed research from 2000 to 2017 (in press) and write that very few studies have investigated the prevalence of the sexualization of girls and women in feature films, despite their prominence and high rate of consumption by adolescents (Ward et al., in press) although research on sexual content (not studied in terms of whether it is sexualizing or not) shows that it is present in high levels and involves women and teens more than men and adults (Nalkur, Jamieson, & Romer, 2010; Bleakley, Jamieson, & Romer, 2012; Callister et al., 2011).

Music Videos & Lyrics

Music is present in the lives and households of children and adolescents, lyrics passed on in schoolyards, and videos of favorite entertainers sought out online. It is well documented that music videos both objectify and degrade women (e.g., Turner, 2011; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). Depending on the study, 59–84% (Turner, 2011; Ward et al., 2013) of videos contain sexual messaging. In music videos, women and female artists are consistently shown in more sexual ways than men and male artists, including the display of more body parts, provocative dress, and sexually suggestive dance and behavior (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; King et al., 2006; Ward, Rivadeneyra, Thomas, Day, & Epstein, 2012; Wallis, 2011; Ward et al., 2013). Black women are more likely to be shown in provocative dress, but white and black women are equally likely to be shown suggestively dancing in revealing outfits. This difference varies by genre, with R&B, rap, and pop music containing more sexual content than rock and country music videos (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; Turner, 2011).

Music lyrics have been found to allude to sexual intercourse in 37% of songs, and when sex is mentioned, 65% of references are degrading in nature (Primack, Gold, Schwarz, & Dalton, 2008). Specifically, men are often referred to as sex-focused and women as sexual objects, with rates of 39% and 36% respectively in rap and hip-hop music (Avery, Ward, Moss, & Uskup, 2017). Studies have also found that sexual content in music has significantly increased from 1960 to the 2000s. References to sexual behavior and sexual objectification have both increased fourfold, with rates of sexual objectification increasing from 6% in the 1970s to 31% in the 2000s (Smiler, Shewmaker, & Hearon, 2017). Consistent with Avery et al. (2017), rates of sexual content varied across genres, ranging from 14% in rock to 32% in R&B and 70% in rap music.

Advertising

Little research has been devoted to the presence of sexualized girls in ads. But as in the APA report, it is important to look at the world that surrounds girls and the sexualized advertisements of women that they may see in magazines for adults, on TV, or in media aimed at adolescents. Studies have found that TV commercials showcase sexually objectifying portrayals of women, with a prevalence for partial female nudity (Lunceford, 2012; Nelson & Paek, 2008). Compared to men, women are much more often suggestively dressed, connoting sexual availability. In an analysis of 254 TV commercials, 52.7% of women were dressed in a sexually suggestive manner in comparison to only 6.6% of men (Prieler & Centeno, 2013). Rates of magazine advertisements featuring women as sexual objects are highest in men's magazines (76%), closely followed by 64% in adolescent girls' magazines and 56% in those intended for adult women (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008).

Magazines

Magazines are a source of both advertisements and stories that promote the sexualization of girls and women. Stankiewicz and Rosselli (2008) found that women were depicted as sexual objects in 51.8% of the advertisements in a variety of magazines. An analysis of four decades of Rolling Stone magazine covers found that sexualized images of men and women have increased, though women continue to be more frequently sexualized than men (Hatton & Trautner, 2011). One study of girls' magazines has shown that the prevalence of sexualization of girls in these magazines has increased over time, with more images of girls in low-cut tee-shirts and tight-fitting clothing than ever before (Graff et al., 2013). These researchers found increased sexualization of women and girls in Seventeen, but also in Girls' Life, a magazine for pre-teen and younger girls.

Products

While the analysis of a variety of products for adults might yield evidence of sexualization in marketing, only a few studies have examined products for children, focusing on gender stereotypes as much as sexualization. One study analyzed Halloween costumes, valentines, dolls, and action figures for gender stereotypes, but its researchers found that in the category of "hyper-feminine" cues, the most common cue for female-gendered characters was that the character was wearing revealing clothing. Indeed, more than half of the female characters that were analyzed wore revealing clothing, while only 20% of the male characters did (Murnen, Greenfield, Younger, & Boyd, 2016). With regard to dolls, Boyd and Murnen (2011) write that the Monster High dolls replaced the Bratz dolls, which replaced the Barbies, each replacement more sexualized than its predecessor. Starr and Ferguson's (2012) study, in which they presented sixty girls ages 6–9 with two paper dolls to choose from, one clad sexily and one not, found that girls choose the sexily clad doll to represent their "ideal self," as well as the doll they thought represented the kind of girl who would be "popular."

Video games are another product used by children that has been analyzed with regard to sexualizing images. Most studies focus, however, on adult games. Miller and Summers (2007) found that in these adult games, female characters were more frequently portrayed as attractive, sexy, helpless, and innocent, while male characters were portrayed as muscular and powerful.

Sports Media

As highlighted in the APA report, the body of research that focuses on women in sports media continues to be minimal in comparison to the widespread coverage of men's sports. Inclusion is not only minimal; it is also selective in a way that contributes to our perception of women in sports. Sports that are perceived as more feminine, like tennis or gymnastics, often have more media coverage (Sturbridge & Roberts, 2013), whereas sports like basketball and soccer are less objectified in the media and portrayed as more masculine sports (Varnes et al., 2013). In addition, when female athletes are given media coverage, it is generally related to their personal lives and stories rather than their performances (Sherry, Osborne, & Nicholson, 2016).

When female athletes are featured, they are often more objectified and sexualized than male athletes, particularly in sports marketing and advertising (Wannaberg, 2011; Nezlek et al., 2015; Darvin & Sagas, 2017). Female athletes must wear sexualized uniforms, such as skirts for tennis and short shorts or bathing suits for volleyball (Nezlek et al., 2015). They are also often presented in sexualized poses that draw attention to their physical appearance rather than their athletic performance (Sherry, Osborne, & Nicholson, 2016). While sexualized female athletes have been rated as more attractive and desirable than non-sexualized athletes, they are also seen as less intelligent, capable, athletic, and self-respecting (Harrison & Secarea, 2010). To compound the situation, female athletes themselves have been blamed for the way in which they are portrayed in the media and told that they are using the wrong kind of media-attraction techniques, as if this were their choice alone (Toffoletti, 2016). However, we have yet to see research that examines the impact on girls and whether the empowerment messaging around girls and sports counteracts these images.

Clothing

As previously stated in the APA report, girls' choice of clothing is related to the development of their gender identity. It is concerning when girls are encouraged to wear clothing that highlights their sexuality as if it were the only—or most important—part of their identity (APA, 2007). In a study of 15 national retailers, researchers found that almost 30% of the clothing items for pre-teen girls represented on their websites had sexualizing characteristics, were associated with what is commonly thought of as sexiness (e.g., red satin lingerie), or was clothing that emphasized a sexualized body part (e.g., a push-up bra) (Goodin et al., 2011). One focus-group study of girls of color indicates that they perceive sexualized clothing as enhancing a girl's confidence when done correctly. But the subjects also describe the constant policing of girls around the culturally constructed thin line between confident and slutty (as Brown wrote in 2005), and they describe how girls of color are more likely to be punished in schools for wearing outfits that administrators think of as sexy (Lamb et al., 2016).

Since the publication of the APA report, the news media annually present sensationalized stories of "sexy" Halloween costumes. Research involving an analysis of 821 costumes and girls' choices shows both over-sexualized feminine characters and infantilized portrayals of princesses (Sullivan, 2012).

Pornography

Pornography is the quintessential sexualized medium that over 90% of boys and over 60% of girls are exposed to during their teen years (Sabina, Wolak & Finkelhor, 2008). Some argue that it is the norm for sex education (Hunter, Figueredo, & Malamuth, 2010; Morgan, 2011) and teaches adolescents how to understand sexual interactions (Peter & Valkenburg, 2010, 2011). While male adolescents first enter the world of pornography around middle school, girls enter a bit later (Allen & Lavender-Stott, 2015). What they see is designed by a commercial enterprise to draw them in so that they become paying customers. It is also designed in a way that perpetuates myths about women's sexuality and encourages sexism and violence against women (Dines, 2010). Klaassen and Peter (2015) looked at the first scene of 100 of the most popular videos from each of the four most popular websites and found that 93% of those contained violence against women. One important study of over 900 boys by Vandenbosch & Eggermont (2015) suggests that exposure to pornographic websites has a direct impact on their own self-objectification.

Consequences of the Sexualization of Girls

As in the APA report, studies of the effects of sexualization and objectification on young adult women are more numerous than those that focus on adolescent girls. And even rarer is the study of the effects on pre-adolescent girls. It may be fair, however, to assume that girls who are exposed to the same material as adolescents are at risk for the same negative consequences.

Consequences: Self-objectification/Self-sexualization
Self-objectification or self-sexualization can be seen as a consequence of living in a society that prizes a girl's sexuality above other features of her personality, her accomplishments, and her interests. Sexual objectification (SO) can be described as a focus on appearance, viewing oneself in an objectified manner, as an object for others' gratification without regard for one's own needs or desires (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Holland & Haslam, 2013). The term tends to be used in the literature as synonymous with self-sexualization, although critics have found this problematic (Lerum & Dworkin, 2009). Research has shown that girls with higher levels of internalized self-sexualization wear more sexualized clothing than girls with lower internalized sexualization (McKenney & Bigler, 2016). While girls have said that they enjoy engaging in self-sexualizing behavior, they also report experiencing higher levels of sexual objectification by others when they do (Liss, Erchull & Ramsey, 2011). And perhaps most important, girls with higher levels of self-sexualization have been shown to have higher levels of body surveillance and body shame than those with low levels of internalized sexualization (McKenney & Bigler, 2016). Frequent exposure to sexually objectifying media has been linked to higher self-sexual objectification in adult women (Vandenbosch, Muise, Eggermont, & Impett, 2015) and in girls (Tiggemann & Slater, 2015). Exposure to and identification with media portrayals of black women as sex objects was related to African American adolescent girls' emphasizing beauty and appearance, although self-sexualization was not measured in this study (Gordon, 2008). In adult women, higher levels of self-objectification have been found to be associated with lower sexual self-esteem, sexual self-competence, sexual satisfaction, and sexual self-efficacy (Calogero & Thompson, 2009; Claudat & Warren, 2014; Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015). SO is also linked to higher self-surveillance in adolescence and young adult women (Grabe & Hyde, 2009; Ward, Seabrook, Manago, & Reed, 2016), which, in turn, may be related to body image and sexuality.

Consequences: Sexist, Stereotyped, and Rape-Supportive Attitudes
While the original APA report suggested that consuming sexualizing media may lead to greater acceptance of traditional gender roles, the double standard, interpersonal violence, and rape-supportive attitudes in young adults (Ward, 2002; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006), recent research has continued to link exposure to sexually objectifying images to greater support for sexism and the objectification of women (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2015). While men's consumption of sexually objectifying media has been linked to greater objectification of their romantic partners and hook-ups, which in turn is linked to lower levels of relationship and sexual satisfaction (Zurbriggen, Ramsey, & Jaworski, 2011), we can wonder if the same will be true of adolescent boys. In a Dutch longitudinal study, Peter and Valkenburg (2009) found that adolescent boys who were exposed to sexually explicit media were subsequently more likely to view women as sex objects.

Consumption of music videos has been linked to greater acceptance of harmful beliefs about sex and sex roles. This exposure has been specifically linked to believing that when women say "no" to sex, they really mean "yes" (Van Oosten, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2015). Exposure to hip hop music videos with highly sexualized content led male participants to show greater objectification of women, stereotypical gender attitudes, and acceptance of rape at post-test compared to men who were exposed to videos with low sexualized content (Kistler & Lee, 2009). Films have also been studied for their impact on relationships. In one study of sexualized females in superhero films, exposure to sexualized-victim images of women decreased egalitarian gender role beliefs (Pennel & Behm-Morawitz, 2015). Research on pornography use indicates that increased exposure is associated with sexism and less egalitarian attitudes toward relationships (Hald, Malamuth, & Lange, 2013) as well as increased belief in rape myths and decreased likelihood to intervene in a potential rape scenario among both male and female users (Brosi et al., 2011; Foubert, Brosi, & Bannon, 2011). Although many of the cited studies use college student samples, a study of adolescents in Belgium that asked teens to play a video game with a sexualized female character later expressed more tolerance of rape myths and of sexual harassment than teens who played the same game with a non-sexualized character (Driesmans,Vandenbosch, & Eggermont, 2015).

Attitudes toward girls' potential and future opportunities may also be affected. Graff et al. (2013) found that when a fifth-grade girl was dressed in sexualizing clothing, she was seen as less intelligent, less competent, and less moral than when she was dressed in childlike clothing. Findings suggest that adolescent girls with sexualized online profile pictures are regarded as less attractive and less competent by peers (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016). This finding is consistent with earlier research on women that shows that women wearing more provocative attire in comparison to conventional or plain attire were seen as less intelligent, less capable, less moral, and lacking in self-respect (Gurung & Chrouser, 2007), which may have ramifications for their academic and vocational endeavors, creating barriers to success. In addition to social and mainstream media, the sexualization of female athletes has contributed to a devaluing of women's athletic abilities and disrespect for women among girls and young women (Daniels & Lavoi, 2013; Darvin & Sagas, 2017). Sexualized images of female athletes encourage a focus on women's physical appearance and perpetuate an ideal body image for women among women (Daniels & Lavoi, 2013; Zurbriggen & Roberts, 2013) and boys looking at female athletes (Daniels & Wartena, 2011). Viewing sexual portrayals of female athletes has been linked to increased self-objectification for female consumers (Nezlek et al., 2015; Varnes et al., 2013).

Consequences: Poorer Mental Health

Body concerns and dissatisfaction are typically measurements that researchers connect to the potential for disordered eating and/or depressive symptoms. Several studies document the connection between exposure to sexualizing media and body concerns, but most use samples of adult women. Bell, Lawson, and Dittmar (2007) documented increased body dissatisfaction after viewing sexually objectifying videos. Exposure to sexualizing media has also been related to feelings of shame, appearance anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and eating disorders in young adults (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2009; Miles-McLean et al., 2015; Moradi & Huang, 2008; Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). This exposure is also associated with low self-esteem, depressed mood, trauma symptoms, and depression in young women (Miles-McLean et al., 2015; Szymanski & Henning, 2007). These effects have been explored in research on sexual minority (lesbian) women with mixed results (Engeln-Maddox, Miller, & Doyle, 2011; Watson, Grotewiel, Farrell, Marshik, & Schneider, 2015).

Consequences: Sex, Behavior, & Relationships
Exposure to sexualization has an impact on how adolescents act and perceive others, including what they may expect in their own sexual encounters (Martino et al., 2009; Ragsdale et al., 2013) and how they perceive others' sexual activities (Bleakley et al., 2017; Frison, Vandenbosch, Trekels, & Eggermont, 2015). It also has been seen to affect their attitudes toward relationships (Hartley, Wight, & Hunt, 2014; Len-Ríos et al., 2016) and knowledge of safe sex practices (Jones, Biddlecom, Hebert, & Mellor, 2011; Watson & McKee, 2013). Teens who consume more sexualized media have lower expectations of contracting a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) or getting pregnant than teens who consume less (Martino et al., 2009; Ragsdale et al., 2013). Adolescent use of sexualizing magazines has been linked to the internalization of cultural beauty standards, self-surveillance, and engagement in French kissing and intercourse compared to their peers (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2015). Additionally, boys' exposure to sexualizing magazines increases the importance they assign to girls' body size and sexual body parts; it also makes them more likely to endorse dating strategies that focus on appearance (Ward, Vandenbosch, & Eggermont, 2015).

Movies have been found to play a role in shaping adolescents' attitudes, cognitions, and perceptions about sexuality, sex roles, and sexual relationships (Bleakley, Hennessy, Fishbein, & Jordan, 2011). Exposure to sexualized media is related more to increased sexual behaviors in white adolescents than for black and Latino adolescents (Hennessy, Bleakley, Fishbein, & Jordan, 2009). Black adolescents exposed to risky sexual behavior in black films were more likely to engage in sexually risky behavior than those exposed to mainstream films. Exposure to sex in media does appear to be related to sexual behaviors; however, it is also true that sexually active adolescents may expose themselves more frequently to sex in the media than non-sexually active teens (Bleakley et al., 2009). On a related note, adolescent pornography use is associated with reduced relationship and sexual satisfaction with real-life partners (Morgan, 2011), and exposure to X-rated movies predicts experiencing dating violence in black adolescents (Raiford, Wingood, & DiClemente, 2007).

Research on video games shows that playing with a sexualized avatar increased self-objectification in adolescents and was unrelated to how often the adolescent played video games (Vandenbosch, Driesmans, Trekels, & Eggermont, 2017). In adults, playing a video game depicting sexual objectification of women and violence against women increased rape myth acceptance in men but not women (Beck, Boys, Rose, & Beck, 2012). College women exposed to sexualized avatars experienced higher levels of self-objectification than those exposed to non-sexualized avatars (Fox et al., 2014).

In experimental studies on college students and adults, viewing sexually objectified women in media increased participants' support for sexist statements and traditional gender stereotypes (Kistler & Lee, 2009; Pennel & Behm-Morawitz, 2015). There has also been support for increased tolerance of sexual violence and harassment following objectifying media exposure (Aubrey, Hopper, & Mbure, 2011; Galdi, Maass, & Cadinu, 2014). Further, this exposure has led to increased rape myth acceptance, victim blaming, and decreased empathy for victims in male participants (Beck et al., 2012; Fox et al., 2014; Loughnan et al., 2013; Romero-Sanchez et al., 2015).

Positive Alternatives and Potential Interventions

Media
While critics voice concerns about the perils of media, it must be recognized that media as a whole are not homogenous, but allow for diverse formats and representations of girls and women. Girls not only consume media; they are also involved in the production of media. Girls use online forums, Instagram, Twitter, video diaries, and the like to share their experiences of media, the culture of sexualization, and how it makes them feel (Gill, 2012). Girls have also used social media to engage in activism around sexuality (Brown, 2016). Some of these efforts include fighting back against sexual violence and "blaming the victim" discourses. However, it is important to note that dynamics such as age, class, and race affect one's participation and may carry more risk for girls with less privilege (Brown, 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2010).

Education
Some sex education programs address sexual content in media (Lamb, 2013a; 2013b). Education can help to construct a more holistic understanding of healthy female sexuality and help girls navigate contradictory sexual messages (Allen, 2011; Fields, 2008; Gilbert, 2014; Lamb, 2010; Lamb, Roberts, & Plocha, 2016). Girls may also benefit from monitoring their engagement and participation in media, paying attention to the way in which men and women are portrayed (Jackson & Vares, 2015). Programming should focus on critical engagement with media, considering how media participation holds the possibility for empowerment (Stokes, 2007).

Education around feminist ideals may also be part of the answer. Murnen and Smolak (2009) found that across 26 studies, feminist women were less likely to internalize idealized media images of women and more likely to report body satisfaction, perhaps due to an ability to critically evaluate and reject negative cultural models.

Sports
General participation in extracurricular activities has not been found to contribute to or prevent self-objectification (Tiggemann & Slater, 2015). Some research, however, has shown that viewing female sporting events is connected to having positive expectations for female athletes (Darvin & Sagas, 2017; Daniels & Wartena, 2011). Thus, increased media coverage of women's athletics may have positive effects for girls and women and encourages participation in athletics (Daniels, 2009; Daniels & Lavoi, 2013; Daniels & Wartena, 2011; Darvin & Sagas, 2017). Studies have shown that increased athletic participation is linked to increased self-esteem in girls and shifting body perceptions from appearance to physical ability (Varnes et al., 2013; Zurbriggen & Roberts, 2013). More research on the effects of sports participation for girls is needed with regard to possible prevention of self-sexualization.

Parents
In two studies, parental attitudes were examined with regard to sexualization of girls. Authoritative parenting style in mothers, including mothers who are less materialistic and mothers who are more religious, may help their daughters to be less affected by exposure to sexualizing material, or may prevent exposure (Starr & Ferguson, 2012). Parental monitoring of internet use is related to less harassment online (Khurana et al, 2015). Parental attitudes and direction are an unmined source of data that could be helpful in preventing the harm that may come from exposure to sexualizing media and marketing.

Conclusion

Much of the research described above has been done with undergraduate participants who are predominantly white, middle class, and educated. The effects on adolescents has been noted in a few studies, and the effects on children with regard to exposure to sexualized media is hardly present at all, save for three or four important studies. When adolescent girls of color have been studied, similar effects have been found. Qualitative research on girls, including girls of color, suggest that girls themselves struggle with their understanding of media and make attempts to deconstruct, analyze, and transform what they consume in ways that feel more empowering to them. These conversations with girls show both the way in which they take up and reproduce standard mainstream dialogues that attempt to reframe sexualization as empowerment (Lamb, 2010; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Peterson & Lamb, 2012), and also resist them (Brown, 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2010).

This update also suggests that research that has followed the APA Task Force Report has continued to confirm the presence and problematic effects of sexualizing media and marketing. The criticism that this is a risk-focused analysis still holds. So while we examine the risks of a pornography-driven, sexualizing media, we need to also advocate for space, time, and education for girls so that they can develop a healthy sexual life—including sexual thoughts, feelings, and acts—that are responsive to alternatives to mainstream media and discussions. The important questions are: With raised feminist consciousness, can girls create their own media, critique mainstream media using a critical lens, and explore their own developing sexuality untouched by these negative influences? Can girls simultaneously enjoy music that degrades women while objecting to its content, e.g., "Blurred lines"? Are there enough options for girls to engage in public discourse about the degradation of women in media and pornography? How do we, as adults, help them to speak up? And, as the critics suggest, can we be open to the pleasures they tell us about in self-sexualization, objectifying others, and a pornography-inspired sexual media? If we can be open to their pleasures and desires, we might also have influence over how they can come to resist and find alternatives.

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