The Sexualization of Female Bodies: Exploring the Problem, Aftermath and Solutions

Melissa K. Taylor, MS, LMFT, CEDS
Outpatient Clinical Director
Center for Change

Norman Rockwell “Girl in the Mirror”
March 6, 1954

Presentation Outline

- Prevalence of media messages
- Implications and effects of sexualized media exposure
- Interventions on a societal and familial level
Healthy Sexuality Vs Sexualization

- Healthy Sexuality
  - Encourages mental health concerns as well as physical concerns
  - Encourages intimacy
  - Bonding between partners
  - Shared pleasure
  - Mutual respect/consent
  - Safe and pleasurable experiences free of coercion, discrimination and violence

WHO, 2012; APA, 2007; Satcher, 2001

Healthy Sexuality Vs Sexualization

- Sexualization (APA 2007 report)
  - Personal worth and characteristics are overlooked in favor of sexual appeal or behaviors
  - Narrow definition of sexuality/attractiveness
  - Person is for others' benefit, rather than a person with independent worth
  - Sexuality is not appropriately imposed

- Sexual Objectification (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997)
  - The experience of being treated as a body (or collection of body parts) valued predominantly for its use to (or consumption by) others.

Quick Reminder

This presentation isn’t about:
- Sex being bad
- Or that expressing sexuality is bad

This presentation is about:
- Exploring the unhealthy sexualization of our culture
Feminism Perspective

- Exposure to sexual media can increase education, agency, diversity, reduce shame
- Feminist perspective can help to lower focus on thinness and eating disorder behaviors/ideology but still shows difficulty with body dissatisfaction
- Feministic perspective can buffer the impact that sexualized media by providing a different lens to cultural expectations
  - Lamb & Peterson, 2012; Brassard, 1995; Tiefer, 1995; Warren & Sincich, 2009

Feminism Perspective: The Other Side of The Coin

- Question: Does media which portrays women as “sexy” decrease women’s power?
  - Are girls critiquing the media? Is their sexual identity authentic?
  - Girls think “this is what boys like”
  - Girls know how to mimic sexual media, but are confused about what sexuality entails
  - Girls can use sexuality to fit in

Why Study Sexualized Media

- One task of Adolescence is to develop sexual identity
- The TV shows they watch, video games they play, songs they listen to, books they read and websites they visit are an enormous part of their lives, offering a constant stream of messages about families, peers, relationships, gender roles, sex, violence, food, values, clothes...
Breakdown of Media Usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Use</th>
<th>Hours per day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL MEDIA USE</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Source data for a survey of TV consumption reading and internet time.

What is out there, what content is concerning?

What are we modeling?

- Average US woman is 5'3.8" & 166 lbs., and wears a size 14.
- Average female model is 5'11" & 117 lbs., and wears a size 2.
- Average US male is 5'9" & 195 lbs.
- Average male model is 5'11"-6'2" & 120-170 lbs.
- 1960-2002 average weight for US adults has increased about 24 pounds and height has increased 1 inch.

- Center for Disease Control, Models.com
Attractiveness and **Youth**

- Media identifies sexuality with youth
  - 13-20 year olds being most likely age group to be seen in sexualized attire or partially naked in films
  - Victoria Secret runway models in lingerie with stuffed animals and toys
  - 30% of the clothing available for pre-teen girls in major stores (Target, Kohls) are sexual in nature
  - Push up bras, red satin lingerie-like dresses

- Sexualized media is increasing in last 20 years
- Current body ideal is “unrealistically thin and increasingly ‘sexy’.”
- Increase in “surveillance”
- “Thin is normative and attractive”
- Thinness is associated with (+) qualities while obesity in the media is associated with (-) traits
- Preschoolers in many studies can identify that thin is (+)

Attractiveness and **Thinness**

- 1995: Intro of TV:  3% of girls reported vomiting to control weight
- 1998: 38 months post TV, 15% reported vomiting to control weight
- 50% of girls that watched TV 3 or more nights per week described themselves as “too fat” compared to non TV watchers.

Fiji Study

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- Becker 2004
3 Canadian towns tested stereotypical gender roles and opinions with boys and girls in the 6th to the 9th grades.

These subjects were tested before/after the introduction of TV to their town.

Tested the impact of media exposure on gender attitude.

The results indicated that girls watching TV reported adopting more traditional gender roles in relationships with peers and authorities.

Boys who watched TV reported more stereotypical attitudes towards behaviors and jobs.

Kimball, 1986

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**Television and Sex Roles**

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**TV**

Megyn Kelly

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“What does The Internet call a woman who scares Donald Trump out of a presidential debate?”

a) Bitch
b) Slut
c) Whores
d) Bimbos
e) Megyn Kelly
f) All of the above

“It was all a jarring reminder of how hard it can be to just be a woman in the spotlight. So often, women are still judged not based on substance but rather are ranked, sorted and ridiculed because of how they look.”


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**TV & First Female Solo Evening News Anchor**
9% of men to 20.8% of women are depicted as sexual objects in TV commercials
In magazines 40% of women are selling themselves instead of products
Female models > male models in fashion and fitness magazines place in violent, submissive, sexualized positions.
80% of women in ads dismembered compared to 17% of male models
Sexualized advertisement decreases buying brand and remembrance of advertisement.
Research shows that when a product is shown to consumers in a violent or sexual way, the consumers’ intent to buy the product decreased.

Lull & Bushman, 2015; APA, 2007; Bushman, 2005

Advertisement: What’s Real/istic?
Music

- Beyoncé’s (Partition)
  Driver roll up the partition please
  I don’t need you seeing Yoncé on her knees
  Took 45 minutes to get all dressed up
  We ain’t even gonna make it to this club
  Now my mascara runnin’, red lipstick smudged
  Oh he so horny, yeah he want to f***
  He popped all my buttons and he ripped my blouse
  He Monica Luwinski’d all on my gown

Movies

- 2012 Top 100 top grossing films
- Filmmaker is female, less female nudity
- Director is female, 10% increase in female characters
- Roughly 16% of directors, writers, producers are female
- 2012 films
- 28% of speaking parts are female
- Top grossing film, females are more likely to be fitted in sexy attire (m=7% f=31%) partially naked (m=9% f=31%)
- 32% increase in teenage partial nudity between 2007-2012
- Smith, Choueiti, Scofield, & Peiper, 2013; APA 2007; Kelly & Smith, 2006

Top G Rated movies

- The G-rating grossing most revenue of any rating, with most of the $ coming from video
- In 101 top grossing G-rated movies (1990-2004)
  - 75% of leading characters male
  - 43% of background characters male
  - 72% of speaking characters male
  - Little change in 14 years

- Smith, Choueiti, Scofield, & Peiper, 2013; APA 2007; Kelly & Smith, 2006
6/7/2016

Geena Davis Organization: See Jane.org

Key Findings / Executive Summary:

- 90% of photos of athletes in SI were of men.
- Female athletes faces were covered more than performance.
- Commentary on female sports is sexualizing towards women playing/women in audience.
- Olympic athletes are deemed less intelligent when shown in sexually attired vs. their athletic uniforms.
- Sexualized media of female athletes decreases interest and viewing in women's sports.
- Male & female athletes are in sexualized attire:
  - Male viewers see athletes as less competent.
  - Female viewers see sexualized female athletes as less competent but not males.

- Nezlek et al., 2015; Gurung & Chrouser, 2007; APA, 2007; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Messner, Duncan, Cooky, 2013; Scultz, 2005; Shugart, 2003

Sports Media

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Teenage Males and Sexualized Athletes

- How does viewing sexualized athletes affect teen males?
- Teen males give a photo of a female athlete doing her sport, a sexualized picture of a female athlete, and a model.
- Did not make sexual comments about female athlete in sport photo.
  - “this photo makes me happy because it reminds me of when the USA women won the world cup in 1999.”
Teenage Males and Sexualized Athletes

- Made negative comments about female athletes in sexualized photos, comments were about female ideal/male gaze comments
  - "This photograph makes me feel kind of sorry for her. She has to publicize something for her sponsors by displaying her body otherwise they'll probably leave her." 15 yr. old boy
- Made less sexualized comments about sexualized models then about sexualized athletes

Sports Magazines

Uniforms, Sexuality, Sports illustrated (ps- no thigh gaps)
Effects on Individuals

Media, Grades, and Personal Contentment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media, Grades and Personal Contentment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gradepoint average across seven grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmet needs of any kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cared for &amp; satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Females end up placing a greater emphasis on how their bodies look rather than how its competency.
- When girls are more focused on self-objectification, they can perform sports less effectively.
- Watching TV, magazines, negative view of body functions.
- menstruating, breastfeeding, sweating.


Physical Health Impact

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When women dress in sexy clothes versus professional clothes they are deemed less qualified for a high status job.

Women in male oriented careers and subjects are seen as less attractive, and if they dress “sexy” in these fields they are seen as less intelligent.

Self-objectification is effortful, disrupting concentration “flow”

Math test, cognitive testing when exposed to sexualized versus non sexualized situation (bathing suit/sweater study).


Cognitive Impact

As media images have become thinner, there has been an increase in A.N.

Internalizing media messages can for many women:

- Increase body dissatisfaction
- Increase body surveillance
- Increase dieting

Viewing fashion magazines is associated with:

- Dieting
- Exercising
- Disordered eating (bulimia)
- Depression

Clark & Tiggemann, 2015; Ferguson, 2013.

Body Image Concerns

Girls too sexy they are bullied or called names “slut”

Girls use attractiveness to gain power over each other.

Increase in body surveillance is connected with being less assertive sexually.

Exposure to sexualized media leads to unrealistic expectations of sexual experiences.

Self-objectification decreases condom use

When females asked about past male partner pornography viewing, research found that there was a connection with perceived porn use and female partner’s body shame/surveillance, eating disorder symptoms.


Female and Sexual Implications
Males and Sexual Implications

- Men and videos with sexual objectifying content report greater acceptance of violence against women and lower concern with the sexual harassment of women.
- Media depicting beauty with strict guidelines impacts how men in US culture see attractiveness in their partners.
- Men who view porn see partners as less attractive, rate sexual performance & affection lower.


Societal Interventions

- Parents can build relationships, educate, be good examples, teaching values that buffer sexualization and objectification.
- Schools can implement curriculums that teach healthy body image.
- Therapists can teach how inner virtues and unique characteristics can help identities.
- Coaches can work on healthy workouts and avoid commenting on bodies, buying non-revealing uniforms.
- You can do what you do best! What is your strength or skill? What can you do to influence someone’s life?

Everyone Can Do Something

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New Modeling Laws

- Spain (2006) - was the first to implement guidelines for models and BMI
- Italy (2006) - models must be 16 years of age, have certificate of good health, and adhere to guidelines of being over the criteria of 18.5 BMI (WHO considered “underweight”)
- Israel (2012) - law passed that models must have BMI over 18.5

New Modeling Laws

- France (2015) - new law states models have to have a doctor’s “certificate” that deems them overall healthy enough to work and to be in an appropriate BMI
- California (2016) - Proposed Bill AB, 2539 asks that state regulators develop appropriate standards to protect models’ health. Proposes that modeling agencies be licensed by the California Labor Commissioner and it clarifies that models are employees, rather than independent contractors, ensuring that models are granted worker protection rights that all employees have in the U.S.

An Op-Ed by Council of Fashion Designers of America President Diane von Furstenberg

“Designers generally produce only one sample size for the runway, and in the last decade there has been a dramatic downward shift in the sample size of some of the top design houses. As a result, models are under increasing pressure to be thinner and thinner, and younger and younger...

The industry’s hiring of prepubescent-appearing teenage girls as models of adult clothing sets an unrealistic standard. Hips and breasts, the curves that define the female figure, are absent. Some models have difficulty maintaining the body ideal as they move into adulthood and run the risk of engaging in unhealthy eating behaviors that lead to eating disorders.”
Council of Fashion Designers of America’s Guidelines

- Educate the industry to identify the early warning signs in an individual at risk of developing an eating disorder.
- Encourage models who may have an eating disorder to seek professional help in order to continue modeling. And models who are receiving professional help for an eating disorder should not continue modeling without that professional’s approval.
- Support the well-being of younger individuals by not hiring models under the age of sixteen for runway shows...
- Supply healthy meals, snacks, and water backstage and at shoots and provide nutrition and fitness education.

Support Companies that Support Healthy Body Image

New Barbie, New Ken??
True or False:

1. Waist to hip ratio is the best predictor of heart disease, however BMI within the ratio is irrelevant.
2. “Fit” people live longer than unfit people, regardless of BMI.
3. “Overweight” people live longer than “normal-sized” people. The health problems associated with obesity may result from dieting.
4. Most people regain the weight they lose even if they continue their diet and exercise programs because of their biological make-up.
5. When it comes to weight, genetics may be more important than environment or learned behavior.
6. BMI is a reliable predictor of health and health risk.
7. Set point is generally determined by genetics

* Barry, J., Long, M., Logan, M., Maine, M. N., Nadeau, J. S.

Educating Self and Family Members

- How To Be Comfortable In Your Own Feathers - Julia Cook

- Bluebird compares herself to other birds (hummingbird)
- Bluebird develops body dysmorphia
- Bluebird over-exercises and goes on a diet, feathers started to fall out
- Bluebird’s mom intervenes and takes the Bluebird to the doctor and the food counselor
- Mother teaches Bluebird about intuitive eating and inner locus of control/value in being a Bluebird
Body Image Intervention

- Write down the 5 people you admire or respect most
- List at least 3 admirable qualities these people demonstrate.

Parental Influence on Body Image

- Mothers who struggle with body dissatisfaction have daughters that report dieting more often
- Fathers’ body size attitudes affect their sons’ body size attitudes
- Parental participation in dieting and exercise can model to children the importance of adopting social norms of thinness
- Parental concern over their own weight or their children’s weight increases the child’s concern over their own weight
- Sons can feel pressure to lose weight and to add muscle if parents feel this is important
- African American girls score higher on body satisfaction due to their mothers’ positive feedback on their style and appearance

- Damiano, et al., 2015; Holub, et al., 2013; Ruggles, et al., 2009; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005

Mother/Daughter Resistance Strategies

- Protective strategies between mothers and daughters have found to buffer ED behaviors and body image concerns:
  1. Filtering: moms did not talk about dieting or their own bodies
  2. Transmitting awareness: ED are dangerous
  3. Positive reinforcement-affirmative talk about daughters’ bodies
  4. Discussion-giving tools to criticize media
  5. Positivity-focus on health and pleasure in eating

- Maer & Craske, 2015; Lavender & Yeggensoen, 2005
Anti-aging Industry

- 6.7 million Botox in 2014, 6% increase from 2013
- Soft tissue fillers 2.3 million procedures in 2014, 3% increase from 2013
- 2013 70% increase in breast lifts (women in mid life) to 90,000
- Expected in 2015 the US spent $114 billion on anti-aging products, up from $80 billion from 2011, global market expected to be at $250 billion


Have a Good Attitude About Aging

"One positive aspect of an Aging Society...is the opportunity it will likely provide for the creative enhancement of interaction between generation, characterized by transfers of support, wisdom, and knowledge." (MacArthur Foundation)

"Exercise, good nutrition, regular health screenings, getting vaccines, having enough sleep, and participating in activities you enjoy are just a few ways to promote healthy aging." (National Institute On Aging)

Eating Disorder Proofing Your Home

- There is no sure way of ridding your home of everything that triggers an eating disorder.
- Throw away all scales—don’t hide them, throw them away. Hidden scales are too easily found.
- Dispose of all laxatives, diet pills, diuretics, or other potentially harmful medication.
- Get rid of all ED clothing.
- Throw away all fashion and exercise magazines or catalogs.
Eating Disorder Proofing Your Home

- Display magazines in your home that encourage hobbies and interest.
- Have uplifting, meaningful, and positive books, music, and movies available.
- Try to eliminate diet talk and lingo from your conversations.
- Don't buy “diet foods”.
- Have the individual’s favorite food around the house for snacking. It is important to enjoy food and not get too hungry.

Create Media Savvy Children

- Discuss:
  - Who created this media product?
  - What is its purpose?
  - What body shapes are shown more +/-
  - What body shapes are not shown at all
  - What is the commercial purpose of this media product?
  - How might different people see this media product differently?
  - What techniques does the media product use to get your attention and to communicate its message?

Encourage Thoughtful Facebook Use

- FB vs non FB users have shown a correlation between FB usage and self-objectification, body dissatisfaction, self-surveillance, internalizing the thin ideal, and dieting
- One study indicated how women use FB correlates with greater disordered eating
- FB users with greater disordered eating put more importance on receiving comments on their status, photos and receiving likes
- FB users with greater eating pathology reported un-tagging their photos more often/impairing their female peer’s photos
- Intervention: Discuss with your child their vulnerability and how they might make internalize EB “responses”, the selected photos that a user might put on FB, photo shopped pictures

Mage, Forney, Keel, 2014

Encourage Thoughtful Facebook Use
Religious beliefs can offer a sense of value through ideals that are contrary to the sexualized culture which fights objectification.

Those who report high levels of dispositional mindfulness attitudes report higher body satisfaction, less preoccupation with weight.

Meditation helps to center the mind and provide a mind-body connection that can increase self-acceptance and decrease body-objectification.


Encouraging Worth Through Spirituality and Mindfulness

Self-compassion meditation has shown to:
- Reduce body dissatisfaction
- Reduce body shame
- Increase feelings of self-worth (when based on appearance)
- Increase body appreciation

Parents can comment on appropriate and inappropriate television content by watching shows with their children.

Friends “failed condom” episode:
- 25% of teens who watched this episode without parents thought condoms were less effective than they previously did before watching.
- “I always discuss commercials with my daughters... ignoring TV is not an option. TV is here to stay and it carries its messages... So the only thing I can do is teach women, in this case, my daughters, to practice critical thinking, you know, watching a commercial and trying to see what meaning it conveys...”


Supervised Screen Time
1. Use your gifts and talents
2. Educate yourself
3. Involve Dads
4. Moms’ influence for positivity
5. Positivity about diverse beauty and aging
6. Eating disorder education/books
7. Self-compassion
8. Eating disorder proofing your home
9. Raising media savvy children
10. Thoughtful media use
11. Supervised screen time
12. Demand new expectations from society

References

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