

## APA Press Release

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### **SEXUALIZATION OF GIRLS IS LINKED TO COMMON MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN GIRLS AND WOMEN-EATING DISORDERS, LOW SELF-ESTEEM, AND DEPRESSION; AN APA TASK FORCE REPORTS**

*Psychologists call for replacing sexualized images of girls in media and advertising with positive ones*

WASHINGTON, DC—A report of the American Psychological Association (APA) released today found evidence that the proliferation of sexualized images of girls and young women in advertising, merchandising, and media is harmful to girls' self-image and healthy development.

To complete the report, the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls studied published research on the content and effects of virtually every form of media, including television, music videos, music lyrics, magazines, movies, video games and the Internet. They also examined recent advertising campaigns and merchandising of products aimed toward girls.

Sexualization was defined by the task force as occurring when a person's value comes only from her/his sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics, and when a person is sexually objectified, e.g., made into a thing for another's sexual use.

Examples of the sexualization of girls in all forms of media including visual media and other forms of media such as music lyrics abound. And, according to the report, have likely increased in number as "new media" have been created and access to media has become omnipresent. The influence and attitudes of parents, siblings, and friends can also add to the pressures of sexualization.

"The consequences of the sexualization of girls in media today are very real and are likely to be a negative influence on girls' healthy development," says Eileen L. Zurbriggen, PhD, chair of the APA Task Force and associate professor of psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. "We have ample evidence to conclude that sexualization has negative effects in a variety of domains, including cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, and healthy sexual development." Research evidence shows that the sexualization of girls negatively affects girls and young women across a variety of health domains:

- Cognitive and Emotional Consequences: Sexualization and objectification undermine a person’s confidence in and comfort with her own body, leading to emotional and self-image problems, such as shame and anxiety.
- Mental and Physical Health: Research links sexualization with three of the most common mental health problems diagnosed in girls and women-eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression or depressed mood.
- Sexual Development: Research suggests that the sexualization of girls has negative consequences on girls’ ability to develop a healthy sexual self-image.

According to the task force report, parents can play a major role in contributing to the sexualization of their daughters or can play a protective and educative role. The APA report calls on parents, school officials, and all health professionals to be alert for the potential impact of sexualization on girls and young women. Schools, the APA says, should teach media literacy skills to all students and should include information on the negative effects of the sexualization of girls in media literacy and sex education programs.

“As a society, we need to replace all of these sexualized images with ones showing girls in positive settings-ones that show the uniqueness and competence of girls,” states Dr. Zurbriggen. “The goal should be to deliver messages to all adolescents-boys and girls-that lead to healthy sexual development.”

Full text of the Executive Summary, Report, and tips on “What Parents Can Do” are available at: <http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html>  
<<http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html>>

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The American Psychological Association (APA), in Washington, DC, is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world’s largest association of psychologists. APA’s membership includes more than 145,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting human welfare.

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American Psychological Association

Direct Link to Report: <http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualizationrep.pdf>

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