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Sexualized Teen Girls:

Tinseltown's New Target

A Study of Teen Female Sexualization in Prime-Time TV

PARENTS
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> PTC intends for this report to speak from a place of passionate concern for young girls everywhere who are affected by media sexualization. It is our firm belief that this issue is bigger than one organization. Our hope is to ignite a national dialogue that will not only unite people, but will result in real change.

The Parents Television Council (PTC) has conducted a study examining teen female sexualization in prime-time TV. The study used sexualization as a mechanism for understanding the proliferation of sexually explicit teen female images in the media. In recent years, the PTC has documented numerous trends of female sexualization. Not only are we observing women becoming more frequently sexualized, the data show a troubling trend in which teen girls are becoming the prime target of the sexualized content. As a follow-up to the female violence report from last year, PTC has elected to examine the sexualization of underage girls in prime-time TV.

As a response to public concern, the American Psychological Association's (APA) 2007 report examined and summarized the best psychological theory, research, and clinical experience on the topic. The APA's study suggests that the sexualization of girls may not only reflect sexist attitudes, a societal tolerance of sexual violence, and the exploitation of girls and women, but may also contribute to these phenomena. The implications of these findings, combined with the lack of research specifically addressing the proliferation and sexualization of underage females, was central to PTC's commitment to examine and better understand issues that are relevant to this vulnerable yet highly targeted population.

Further, PTC recognizes that central to every parent's concerns are not only the issue of a child's attitude towards sex, but also the process by which knowledge, attitudes, and values about sexuality are acquired. Past and present research continues to demonstrate the power of media as a highly persuasive device for delivering images and messages into our homes. Unfortunately, television often presents teens with new models of bad behavior, frequently within a framework that is void of consequences. The result is that today's youth are growing up with a media-market version of sexuality.

Ultimately, the risks for these girls lie in the tendency for mass media messages to miscommunicate the true definition of what it means to be female. However, the greater risk is in sending the message to today's young girls that their sexuality is their primary identity and most valued commodity.

The present study analyzed all scripted programs within a Nielsen ranking of the top 25 prime-time shows for viewers aged 12-17 in the 2009–2010 season. The results presented in this report should make this topic of importance to every parent. Below are a few of our findings:

Major Findings:

- The presence of an underage female was associated with higher amounts of sexualizing depictions compared to the onscreen appearance of an adult female. Though an older female character is more likely to have sexualizing dialogue in the scene, a younger female character is more likely portrayed in sexualizing behaviors onscreen.

- Out of all the sexualized scenes depicting underage or young adult female characters, 86% of those female characters were presented as only being of high school age.

- Only 5% of the underage female characters communicated any form of dislike for being sexualized.

- One or several instances of implied nudity and/or sexual gestures (e.g. suggestive dancing, erotic kissing, erotic touching and/or implied intercourse) were in every onscreen scene that contained sexualized depictions of underage girls.

- It is unclear how existing parental devices like the V-Chip can be useful in helping families avoid explicit sexual content portrayed by underage characters, given that 75% of the shows that contained the content did not have an S-descriptor in the content rating.

The body of this document contains other findings. In summary, results from this report show that when underage female characters appear on screen, there is: more sexualizing content depicted; fewer negative responses to being sexualized; more sexualizing incidents occurring outside of any form of committed relationships; more female initiation in the sexualized scenes, or mutual agreement between the teen and her partner that the sexualizing incident is acceptable; and less accuracy in the content rating.

Current study findings show that underage girls are rapidly becoming the new female image of sexualization in the media. It is the hope of the PTC that the present study will ignite a national dialogue about the sexualization of teenaged girls in entertainment media. Such a national dialogue demands the involvement, awareness, and commitment to positive change by every segment of the marketplace, including:

- Parents, who must pay closer attention to the numerous and often harmful media images and messages their daughters are consuming in entertainment;
- The creators, performers and distributors of entertainment media, who must understand the magnitude of their influence and the role they play;
- The advertisers, whose media dollars underwrite television programming that contains sexualized content;
- Industry commentators and journalists, whose critical observations help to influence the behavior of the entertainment industry;
- Our public servants, who have regulatory oversight of the public airwaves and who must ensure that the public interest is being served;
- And teenaged girls themselves, who must understand the sexualization issue and take an active and aggressive stance, either individually or collaboratively through groups like SPARK.

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Many parents wrestle emotionally with the dramatic developmental changes they witness as their children grow from elementary school age to middle school age; yet they understand the changes are as important as they are normal and natural. The scientific community generally accepts adolescence as an important time of sexual exploration and development (Adelson, 1980; Arnett, 2000; W. A. Collins & Sroufe, 1999); and they consider it as a period of discovering one's sexual attitudes and values. During this time, parents are rightly concerned about potentially negative outside influences.

Recognizing that teens are particularly vulnerable to media influence, the Parents Television Council has chosen to examine teen female sexualization in the media as the second study in our "Women and Media Series."

Introduction

Mainstream media have become saturated with girls portraying adult images of sexuality. Past research and numerous reports concur that when females are shown on screen, it is often in a highly sexual or provocative matter. Consequently, the proliferation of sexualized images of and references to teens and women in the media have sent a strong message to young girls that sexualization is not only normal, it is socially acceptable. Clearly, there are inherent dangers in having a cultural milieu that accepts and encourages this sexual contradiction of encouraging underage girls to look sexy, yet realizing they know very little about what it means to be sexual. A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now reported that young teens ranked entertainment media as their top source for information regarding sexuality and sexual health. These findings demonstrate media outrank parents and peers as the primary sexual educators of young girls.

Of equal concern is the lack of experience teenagers have in making rational and responsible decisions about pleasure and risk within intimate relationships (Tollman, 2002, APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2007). For years, scholars have recognized that teens may be particularly vulnerable to media influence (Cope-Farrar & Kunkel, 2002; Greenberg & Busselle, 1994; Heintz-Knowles, 1996; Kunkel et. al., 2003; Kunkel et al., 1999; Lowry & Shidler, 1993). Findings across several studies report the negative impact that frequent exposure to sexualized media images and models of passivity can cause. They include risks to a female's cognitive, emotional, and physical development, as well as her self-image. Further, research shows that girls and young women who consume more mainstream media content demonstrate greater acceptance of stereotypes that depict women as sexual objects (L.M. Ward 2002; L.M. Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006).

The issue and impact of teen sexualization in the media is exacerbated by the continual increase in media usage among teens (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). A recent report revealed children are spending more time than ever before consuming entertainment media –more than 75 hours a week (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). These rates indicate that teens are spending nearly twice as much time viewing media than they spend in school and 1/3 more time than is spent sleeping. This increase is due, in large part, to devices that allow children to access media content away from the traditional confines of the TV schedule and movie screen.

Ultimately, the question every parent must answer is, "What media models and messages are my children consuming?" The Parents Television Council has made an effort to answer that question by analyzing scripted shows Nielsen listed as being in the top 25 most watched among ages 12-17. The findings in this report are a must-read for every parent.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain greater insight into the type and degree of sexualized images and references among teen girls within scripted prime-time broadcast programming. Specifically, two questions were used to address this study topic. They were: 1) How is teen sexualization represented in the media?; and 2) What is the frequency of teen sexualizations in the media? Although anyone can be sexualized (girls, boys, men, women), this study specifically focused on the sexualization of teen girls.

The current study acknowledges a distinction between sexual incidents and incidents of sexualization. In other words, it is the difference between "sexual" and "sexualized." By making this distinction, PTC acknowledges that there are many "sexual" images that represent healthy sexuality (sexual incidents that foster intimacy, bonding, shared pleasure and mutual respect between consenting partners). In contrast, sexualized images represent someone or something being made sexual in quality or character and/or being given sexual significance (American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls). Images of healthy sexuality (intimacy, bonding, etc.) were identified and categorized separately.

Definition of "Sexualization"

For purposes of this study, "sexualization" was defined as the act or process of sexualizing. It refers to the making of a person, group or thing to be seen as sexual in nature or a person to become aware of sexuality. It also refers to the making of an interpersonal relationship into a sexual relationship.

The American Psychological Association (APA) regards a person as being sexualized in any of the following situations:

- a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or sexual 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. (Especially relevant to children).

(Referenced from the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls)

Methodology

Nielsen data were used to identify the top 25 prime-time broadcast shows for ages 12 – 17. Only scripted programs within a list of the top 25 were identified. Analysts specifically focused on programming that aired during the first two weeks of the November 2009 sweeps period [October 29 – November 11, 2009], as well as during the first two weeks of the May 2010 sweeps period [April 29 – May 12, 2010]. Collectively, analysts viewed a total of 45 episodes for 14 different scripted shows. They include: *The Office*, *NCIS*, *Two and a Half Men*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Lost*, *Family Guy*, *House*, *Glee*, *The Cleveland Show*, *American Dad*, and *The Simpsons*. A total of 246 incidents were identified across all age groups (underage, young adults and adults) within 35 programming hours.

Data collection consisted of analysts viewing scripted programs that aired during the study period and conducting a content analysis to address the following variable categories: Genre (scripted – legal drama, medical drama, police procedural, etc.); content rating (TV-PG, TV-14); type of sexual behaviors and references within the sex scene (i.e. partial nudity, sexual gestures, sexual references, etc.); quality of relationship (healthy/unhealthy); number of times these acts were displayed visually or referenced; sex of the initiator; participant's attitude toward the sexualizing incident (positive/negative); whether the sexualized scene was humorous or non-humorous; relationship status of the participants (*inside a committed relationship/outside a committed relationship); and age/perceived age of the female character (underage, young adult, or adult).

Programs were digitally recorded, then systematically evaluated using scientific content analysis procedures applied by trained analysts. A total of 45 episodes were analyzed scene by scene. Each scene was examined for the presence of sexualization based on the above-stated definition. Scenes that were sexual but did not contain instances of sexualization were not included in the study. Only scenes containing images or references that represented female sexualization were analyzed.

The data collection process was initiated with a very limited set of sexualization variables. The variable list expanded as new variables were presented within the various scenes and incorporated into the codebook. The goal was to allow reality to inform the research. Consequently, PTC conducted data analyses on both content and contextual data. Content data consisted of a comprehensive list of scene elements specific to the sexualizing incident. The list ranged from sexual references to partial nudity to

various types of sexual depictions, including simulated intercourse. Analysts also coded contextual variables which described elements of the environment in which the sexualization occurred (e.g., sex of the initiator, females' age, female participants' attitude towards the sexualization). Also, data were analyzed by episode relative to genre and content ratings.

During the data collection process intercoder reliability was of the highest importance. Intercoder reliability testing was conducted during pilot testing to assist in troubleshooting and diagnosing relevant logging and other research issues. Reliability testing was also conducted at several points throughout the data collection process to ensure high levels of validity and reliability were maintained.

A **committed relationship is an interpersonal relationship based upon a mutually agreed upon commitment to one another involving exclusivity, honesty, or some other agreed upon behavior. Examples of committed relationships include: marriage, courtship, long-term relationships, engagement, etc.*

***A **sexualizing incident** is defined as a distinct occurrence or action that is representative of "sexualization."*

Major Findings

- The incident-to-scene ratio for sexualization was almost equal, totaling 1.18 incidents per scene for underage girls versus 1.29 incidents per scene for adult females. Table 1 in the appendix identifies the various physical and intimate behaviors, images and references identified and analyzed within each scene of the scripted prime-time television programming (Table 1).

- Underage female characters are shown participating in a higher percentage of sexualizing depictions compared to adults (47% and 29% respectively). The majority of scenes featuring adult female characters involved verbal sexual references. Underage depictions consisted of implied nudity and/or sexual gestures (suggestive dancing, erotic kissing, erotic touching and/or implied intercourse) (Table 1).

- Only 5% of the underage female characters communicated any form of dislike for being sexualized (excluding scenes depicting healthy sexuality). The current study findings also revealed that when a teen appeared on-screen they were more likely to have a positive or unconcerned response to being sexualized compared to when an adult appeared on-screen (Table 3).

- Eighty-six percent of all the sexualized female characters depicted in the underage and young adult category (excluding adults) were presented as only being of high school age (see Table 2). The underage and young adult group combined accounted for 23% of the sexualized scenes (excluding those that were unclear).

- Seventy-five percent of shows that included sexualized underage female characters were shows that did not have an S-descriptor to warn parents of the sexual content. The failure to include an accurate rating rendered the use of content descriptors ineffective in protecting children and families from the barrage of sexual content. Content descriptors are used to trigger a mechanism in the V-chip that allows families who do not wish to be exposed to such content to block the programs from coming into their homes (Table 9).

- Based upon a definition established by the APA of "healthy" vs. "unhealthy" sexuality, the study findings show that 93% of the sexualizing incidents among underage female characters occurred within a context that qualified to be categorized as "unhealthy." Although underage characters depicted healthy relationships at a slightly higher rate (7%) compared to adults (3%), results from both groups suggest that media models of healthy behaviors within intimate relationships are more and more becoming the exception rather than the norm (Table 4).

- The data revealed that 98% of the sexualizing incidents involving underage female characters occurred with partners with whom they did not have any form of committed relationship. Similar to the previous findings, the data show that today's media provide few models of healthy sexuality. That is to say, there are very few models of intimacy and bonding within healthy committed relationships (Tables 6 and 7).

- Sixty-seven percent of the episodes involving sexualized scenes of underage girls were in a comedic genre (comedy dramas and/or animated series) (Table 8). Further examination revealed that 73% of the sexual incidents (excluding relationships that represented "healthy" sexuality) were presented in a humorous manner designed to evoke laughter (Table 5). The significance of this finding is well documented and based in literature addressing the power of laughter to desensitize and trivialize topics that might normally be viewed as disturbing. The proliferation of sexualization is further revealed in a second analysis comparing genre with the humorous vs. non-humorous intent of the scripted scene. The study revealed that images and references to underage sexualized females were viewed as funny even within genres not intended for comedy.

- The data show that 73% of the underage sexualized incidents were presented in a humorous manner or as a punch line to a joke (Table 5).

- Fifty-five percent of the sexualized incidents involving underage characters were either initiated by the female or presented as being mutually agreeable between the teen and her partner. Interestingly, comparisons between adult and underage females show that underage sexualizing incidents that are female-initiated or deemed mutually agreeable occur at a higher rate than adults. Sexualized incidents involving adult characters were either initiated by the female or presented as being mutual between the man and the woman 53% of the time (Table 6).

CONCLUSION

Past research clearly demonstrates that girls exposed to sexualizing and objectifying media are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction, depression, and lower self-esteem as well as being impacted in their perceptions of virginity and/or their first sexual experience. The current study findings clearly show that the most powerful medium in the world – television – is exacerbating rather than reversing this troubling trend.

In October, *GQ* magazine created a firestorm of controversy when it featured actresses Lea Michele and Dianna Agron, stars of the Fox series *Glee,* in quasi-pornographic poses, wearing clothing and on sets designed to evoke high-school. That same month, seventeen-year-old Taylor Momsen, star of the CW's teen-targeted *Gossip Girl,* posed for a magazine cover wearing black lingerie, stilettos, and a gun belt. More recently, the annual *Victoria's Secret Fashion Show* featured a segment in which sexy adult models walked up and down the runway in lingerie and rainbow-striped knee-socks, against a bubble-gum, balloons, and butterflies backdrop.

To any parent of a pre-teen or teenage girl, the harm of such imagery is readily apparent. How does a parent persuade a 13-year-old girl not to worry about being sexy when every magazine cover, billboard, movie, and television program tells her otherwise? How does one persuade them that such overt sexuality is best reserved for adulthood, if they are daily confronted with images linking adult sexuality to adolescence and even childhood?

The goal of this report is to bring awareness to this disturbing trend and create an understanding that this topic crosses every geographic, ethnic, political, and religious persuasion. This is a study for "every girl." Our message is plain and simple. We are greatly concerned and are asking the question, "What can be done to make a positive and lasting difference?"

Any long-term solution requires national consensus and an immediate commitment to address and reverse this problem; and it demands the involvement, awareness, and dedication to positive change from every segment of the marketplace, including:

- Parents, who must pay closer attention to the numerous and often harmful media images and messages their daughters are consuming in entertainment;
- The creators, performers and distributors of entertainment media, who must understand the magnitude of their influence and the role they play;
- The advertisers, whose media dollars underwrite television programming that contains sexualized content;
- Industry commentators and journalists, whose critical observations help to influence the behavior of the entertainment industry;
- Our public servants, who have regulatory oversight of the public airwaves and who must ensure that the public interest is being served;
- And teenaged girls themselves, who must understand the sexualization issue and take an active and aggressive stance, either individually or collaboratively through groups like SPARK.

Appendix

(Tables 1 – 8)

Tables 1 through 7 present the data by scene

Tables 8 and 9 present the data by episode

Analyses by Scenes (See Tables 1 – 7)

**Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages Comparing Sexualized Images and
References of Underage and Adult Female Characters**

Study Variables	Age of Female Characters Underage Only	Age of Female Characters Adult Only	Age of Female Characters Unclear
PHYSICAL & INTIMATE BEHAVIORS, IMAGES AND REFERENCES	**48% (Underage Depictions)**	**29% (Adult Depictions)**	
Non-Overt Sexualization	12	24	
Sexual Reference/Innuendo	18	117	16
Partial Nudity		7	1
Obscured Nudity			
Implied Nudity	2	8	1
Sex Toys Depicted			
Sexual Gestures: Suggestive Dancing; Erotic Kissing; Erotic Touching; Implied Intercourse)	17	37	
Anatomical/STD Reference	3	25	4
Sex Depicted – General		6	
Sex Depicted - Prostitution		1	
Sex Depicted - Oral Sex			1
TOTAL	**52**	**225**	**23**

*   More than one behavior can be represented per scene. Therefore, percentages do not equal 100%.

**   The variable "Non-Overt Sexualization" has been excluded from the percentage of depictions. This category represents scenes in which sexualization was intentionally ambiguous and communicated using subtle overtones and social cues. Some scenes required knowledge of a previous storyline or history and/or knowledge of the characters' general disposition. Including the variable "Non-Overt Sexualization" changes the percentages from 48% and 29% to 37% and 26% respectively.

*** The categories "Sexual References/Innuendo" and "Anatomical/STD References" are excluded from the calculations for depictions.

Table 2: Frequencies and Percentages of Sexualized Scenes by Age

Study Variables	Age of Female Characters (young adult is equivalent to one's beginning college years)	Age of Female Characters Adult Only	Age of Female Characters Unclear
FEMALE AGE (per scene)	**86% (percentage of underage characters)**		
Underage	44		
Young Adult	7		
Adult		175	
Unclear			20
TOTAL	**51**	**175**	**20**

Table 3: Frequencies and Percentages of Female Characters' Attitudes Toward Being Sexualized Based on Age

Study Variables	Age of Female Characters Underage Only	Age of Female Characters Adult Only	Age of Female Characters Unclear
PARTICIPANT'S ATTITUDE (per scene) **Calculated from unhealthy scenes only**	**5% (percentage of negative reactions to being sexualized)**	**16% (percentage of negative reactions to being sexualized)**	
Positive	**16**	**522**	1
Negative	**2**	**27**	1
Unclear/Neutral	**23**	**90**	18
TOTAL	**41**	**169**	**20**

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Table 4: Frequencies and Percentages of Sexualized Scenes by Quality of the Relationship and Age

Study Variables	Age of Female Characters Underage Only	Age of Female Characters Adult Only	Age of Female Characters Unclear
HEALTHY VS. UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS (per scene)	**7%** (Scenes characterizing healthy sexuality)	**3%** (Scenes characterizing healthy sexuality)	
Healthy Sexuality	3	6	
Unhealthy Sexuality	41	169	20
TOTAL	**44**	**175**	**20**

*healthy sexuality is defined as sexual incidents that appear to foster intimacy, bonding, shared pleasure and mutual respect between consenting partners.

Table 5: Frequencies and Percentages of Humorous and Non- Humorous Sexual Scenes by Age

Study Variables	Age of Female Characters Underage Only	Age of Female Characters Adult Only	Age of Female Characters Unclear
VERBAL VS. VISUAL HUMOR (per scene) **Calculated from unhealthy scenes only**	**73%** (verbally and/or visually humorous scenes)	**75%** (verbal and/or visual humorous scenes)	
Verbal-Humorous	22	115	19
Verbal - Non-Humorous	4	22	
Visual Humorous	11	21	2
Visual Non-Humorous	8	23	
TOTAL	**45**	**181**	**21**

* One scene may contain both verbal and non-verbal references or depictions. Therefore, percentages do not equal 100%.

Table 6: Frequencies and Percentages of Sexualized Scenes by Gender of the Initiator and Age

Study Variables	Age of Female Characters Underage Only	Age of Female Characters Adult Only	Age of Female Characters Unclear
SEX OF THE INITIATOR (per scene)	**55%** (female-initiated or mutually-initiated scenes)	**53%** (female-initiated or mutually-initiated scenes)	
Male	14	68	13
Female	9	54	1
Mutual	13	34	1
Unclear	**5**		5
TOTAL	**41**	**169**	**20**

Table 7: Frequencies and Percentages for the Relationship Status within Each Scene by Age

Study Variables	Age of Female Characters Underage Only	Age of Female Characters Adult Only	Age of Female Characters Unclear
RELATIONSHIP STATUS (per scene)	**98%** (outside of a committed relationship)	**82%** (outside of a committed relationship)	
Inside a committed Relationship	1	31	2
Outside a Committed Relationship	19	118	7
Unclear	24	26	11
TOTAL	**44**	**175**	**20**

A **committed relationship is an interpersonal relationship based upon a mutually agreed upon commitment to one another involving exclusivity, honesty, or some other agreed upon behavior. Examples of committed relationships include: marriage, courtship, long-term relationships, engagement, etc.*

Analysis by Episode (See Tables 8 – 9)

Table 8: Frequencies and Percentages of Episodes by Genre and Age

Study Variables	Age of Female Characters Underage Only	Age of Female Characters Adult Only	Age of Female Characters Unclear
GENRE (per episode)	**67%** **(number of episodes within comedic genres)**	**64%** **(number of episodes within comedic genres)**	
Comedy Drama	3	5	1
Medical Drama		7	1
Police Procedural	1	3	
Science-fiction or Fantasy	3	3	
Situation Comedy		10	3
Animated Television Series	5	8	7
TOTAL	**12**	**36**	**12**

Table 9: Frequencies and Percentages for TV Content Rating Descriptors by Age

Study Variables	Age of Female Characters Underage Only	Age of Female Characters Adult Only	Age of Female Characters Unclear
CONTENT DESCRIPTORS (per episode)	**75%** **(episodes not containing an S-descriptor)**	**78%** **(episodes not containing an S-descriptor)**	
D	8	24	12
L	11	23	10
S	3	8	4
V	16	17	6

What Parents Can Do

(Copied from the APA Report on the Sexualization of Girls).

Tune in and Talk

Watch TV and movies with your daughters and sons. Read their magazines. Surf their Web sites. Ask questions. "Why is there so much pressure on girls to look a certain way?" "What do you like most about the girls you want to spend time with?" "Do these qualities matter more than how they look?" Really listen to what your kids tell you.

Question Choices

Girls who are overly concerned about their appearance often have difficulty focusing on other things. Clothes can be part of the distraction. If your daughter wants to wear something you consider too sexy, ask what she likes about the outfit. Ask if there's anything she doesn't like about it. Explain how clothes that require lots of checking and adjusting might keep her from focusing on school work, friends, and other activities.

Speak up

If you don't like a TV show, CD, video, pair of jeans, or doll, say why. A conversation with her will be more effective than simply saying, "No, you can't buy it or watch it." Support campaigns, companies, and products that promote positive images of girls. Complain to manufacturers, advertisers, television and movie producers, and retail stores when products sexualize girls. Girls get this message repeatedly: What matters is how "hot" they look. It plays on TV and across the Internet. You hear it in song lyrics and music videos. You see it in movies, electronic games, and clothing stores. It's a powerful message. As parents, you are powerful too. You can teach girls to value themselves for who they are, rather than how they look. You can teach boys to value girls as friends, sisters, and girlfriends, rather than as sexual objects. And you can advocate for change with manufacturers and media producers.

Understand

Young people often feel pressure to watch popular TV shows, listen to music their friends like, and conform to certain styles of dress. Help your daughter make wise choices among the trendy alternatives. Remind her often that who she is and what she can accomplish are far more important than how she looks.

Educate

You may feel uncomfortable discussing sexuality with your kids, but it's important. Talk about when you think sex is OK as part of a healthy, intimate, mature relationship. Ask why girls often try so hard to look and act sexy. Effective sex education programs discuss media, peer, and cultural influences on sexual

behaviors and decisions, how to make safe choices, and what makes healthy relationships. Find out what your school teaches.

Encourage

Athletics and other extracurricular activities emphasize talents, skills, and abilities over physical appearance. Encourage your daughter to follow her interests and get involved in a sport or other activity. **Be real.** Help your kids focus on what's really important: what they think, feel, and value. Help them build strengths that will allow them to achieve their goals and develop into healthy adults. Remind your children that everyone's unique and that it's wrong to judge people by their appearance.

Model

Marketing and the media also influence adults. When you think about what you buy and watch, you teach your sons and daughters to do so, too.

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