

# Keeping Girls Media Smart

## What Everyone Needs to Know

[www.cybersafegirl.ca](http://www.cybersafegirl.ca)

Girls are flooded by all kinds of hypersexual images of girls and women through the media. This includes television, music videos, music lyrics, movies, magazines, sports media, video games, the internet and advertising.

Some media messages over-sexualize females and target girls as naive consumers. Understanding this can help girls navigate through this technology- and media-savvy world we all live in.

### The Facts

- Sexualization occurs when:
  - a person's sense of worth comes only from sexual appeal or behaviour.
  - a person's physical attractiveness equates with being sexy.
  - a person is a sex object for the sexual use of others. The person is not seen as capable of acting and deciding on his/her own.
  - sexuality is imposed on a person.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2009, 87 per cent of Canadians thought that advertising was too focused on young women being sexy and not enough on their abilities and intelligence.<sup>2</sup>
- Social messages on desirability and "beauty" converge to affect the self-esteem and self-image of girls. This results in poor body image, low self-esteem and eating disorders.<sup>3</sup>
- There are a lot of messages in media about thinness, diet and beauty. This implies that "ordinary" girls are always in need of adjustment. The female body is an object to be perfected.<sup>4</sup>
- Women's magazines have many more ads and articles promoting weight loss than men's magazines. Over three quarters of the covers of women's magazines include at least one message on how to change a women's appearance by diet, exercise or cosmetic surgery.<sup>5</sup>
- Research reports that underweight women are over-represented on TV sitcoms. Only five per cent of women on sitcoms are overweight.<sup>6</sup>
- The average female model is taller and weighs 23 per cent less than the average woman who is 5'4 and weighs 148 lbs.<sup>7</sup>
- The 2010 Health Behaviour School-aged Children study showed that more girls believed that they were too fat. This belief rose from 26 per cent in grade six to 39 per cent in grade ten.<sup>8</sup>
- By grade 10, over 20 per cent of Canadian girls are taking steps to lose weight.<sup>9</sup>
- Widespread low self-esteem among girls is driven by bullying and the constant stream of media and social messages about how girls should look and behave.<sup>10</sup>

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- Research links images of thin, young, air-brushed female bodies to depression, low self-esteem and poor eating habits in girls and young women.<sup>11</sup>
- In Canada, 37 per cent of 11 year old girls, 42 per cent of 13 year old girls, and 48 per cent of 15 year old girls, admit they would change their looks if they could.<sup>12</sup>
- **Self-esteem:** How one feels about oneself. High self-esteem is a good feeling about oneself. Low self-esteem means feeling poorly about oneself. Self-esteem is crucial to positive living.
- **Sexual exploitation:** Treating a young person as a sexual object. Sexual exploitation of a young person involves unwanted direct or indirect physical contact for sex by a person in authority or trust. Sexual exploitation of children (persons under 18 years of age) is child sexual abuse. Forms of child exploitation are: sex trafficking, sex tourism, child pornography and exploitive child modeling, and internet luring.<sup>15</sup>

### Glossary

- **Body image:** The mental picture you have of your body. It includes attitudes and feelings about how you look and how you think other people see you.<sup>13</sup> Poor body image can lead to low self-esteem, poor self-image and eating disorders.<sup>14</sup>
- **Hypersexualization:** Treating women and girls, including oneself, as over-sexualized objects of desire. Hypersexualized girls are often viewed as being concerned or involved in sex. It portrays girls as sex objects. An example of hypersexualization would be a picture of a young girl wearing make-up.
- **Stereotyping:** The act of judging a person or group based on an image of the entire group. People are often stereotyped by race, age or geography.

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Updated April 2014