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## Journal of Sex Research

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t775653667>

### “Bad Girls Rule”: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Commentary on the Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls

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**To cite this Article** Lerum, Kari and Dworkin, Shari L.(2009) “Bad Girls Rule”: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Commentary on the Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, Journal of Sex Research, 46: 4, 250 — 263

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/00224490903079542

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00224490903079542>

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## ARTICLES

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### **“Bad Girls Rule”<sup>1</sup>: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Commentary on the Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls**

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*Feminist, critical, and postmodern scholars have long recognized sexuality as a site of power relations. The recently released Report of the APA (American Psychological Association) Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls is a welcome addition to ongoing feminist and activist conversations on how to intervene on issues of sexuality in the name of girls' and women's health. This article offers a critical interdisciplinary analysis of this influential APA report, expanding on and challenging several of its main claims. This article critiques the report as over-determining the negative impact of sexualization; offers other literatures as critical additions including feminist literature on media, consumer culture, gender, and the body, and earlier “pro-desire” feminist psychology scholarship; and critiques the task force's conflation of objectification and sexualization. The article concludes with a call for broadening feminist scholarship and activism across disciplinary boundaries to emphasize girls' and women's sexual agency and resistance, as well as sexual health and rights.*

On February 20, 2007, the American Psychological Association [APA] published the *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* (available at [www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html](http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html)). An appointed task force of six psychologists and one public member joined together to fulfill the following charge:

The Task Force will examine and summarize the best psychological theory, research, and clinical experience addressing the sexualization of girls via media and other cultural messages, including the prevalence of these messages and their impact on girls, and include attention to

the role and impact of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The Task Force will produce a report, including recommendations for research, practice, education and training, policy, and public awareness. (APA, 2007a, p. 1)

This particular report followed on the heels of several APA stances and policy resolutions that were presented over the past few years that have been critical of the impact of media on children and youth.<sup>2</sup> The authors of this newest APA report were thorough and ambitious, analyzing approximately 280 peer-reviewed journal articles, 80 books and book chapters, and dozens of other sources.<sup>3</sup>

The APA (2007a) task force defines *sexualization* as a condition that occurs when a person is subjected to at

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<sup>1</sup>“Bad Girls Rule” is one of several phrases inscribed on the front page of the American Psychological Association task force report, with the intent of illustrating and critiquing slogans that sexualize girls. Other terms include “good girls do bad things,” “flirty baby,” “hot chick!,” “hottie,” and others. We borrow this slogan for our title to suggest that this phrase and others like it can evoke more than one type of feminist interpretation.

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<sup>2</sup>Recent American Psychological Association positions are concerned with the negative impact of violent media (including video games) on youth and the negative impact of advertising on young children.

<sup>3</sup>Other sources included newspaper and magazine articles, unpublished manuscripts, conference papers, dissertations, organizational reports, and documentary films.

least *one* of the following four conditions:

1. A person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics.
2. A person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy.
3. 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.
4. Sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person. (p. 2)

The task force concluded that the sexualization of girls is pervasive in U.S. culture and that this negatively impacts girls' "cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, sexuality, and attitudes and beliefs" (APA, 2007a, p. 2). The authors provide numerous possible interventions to reverse the incidence of girls' sexualization and its negative impact.

The APA task force report is a welcome addition to ongoing conversations about constructions of sexuality and girlhood, particularly in relation to commercial media. While recent APA interest in media has focused on how violent media images negatively impact children and youth, this particular report articulates how contemporary psychological literature can explain how sexualized (but not necessarily violent) images negatively impact girls and women. In an historical time and place where people's understanding of themselves and the world is increasingly "mediated" by multimedia messengers (de Zengotita, 2005), this report is important and timely. Additionally, by providing this report to the public in accessible language combined with pragmatic points of action for concerned citizens, the APA continues to take the lead in a growing movement within academia toward public scholarship and activism.

It is due to the magnitude of this report, and its impact beyond psychology, that we have taken the time to construct this response. In the pages that follow, we engage a burgeoning set of interdisciplinary contributions on the topic of sexualization, media, and gender. In so doing, we enter the conversation as "outsiders" to psychology but insiders to feminist and public scholarship and a range of other disciplines including sociology, public health, queer studies, media studies, and sexuality studies. While recognizing the strengths of this report, we also challenge its central thesis: Sexualization should be designated as a harmful and dangerous process that only has negative impacts on girls and women.

### Stakeholders in Sexuality and Girlhood

Before summarizing and evaluating the content of the APA task force report, we first consider how the APA's

interpretation of sexualization is framed by broader (North American) discussions around sexuality. Sexuality and girlhood are topics that command significant attention from numerous stakeholders.<sup>4</sup> Each of these constituencies is diverse both within and across their positions on what the "problem" is with sexuality and girlhood, and each differs in their assessment of who stands to gain or lose when girls are sexy, sexual, and sexualized. For example, in the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, social conservatives have long been concerned with keeping girls' and women's sexuality confined within racialized, classed, and patriarchal boundaries (Hill-Collins, 1990; Hooks, 1984), resulting in campaigns to keep girls and women (hence, family, race, and nation) pure of sexual "corruption."

For different reasons, feminists too have a long history of activism concerning girls, women, and sexuality, sometimes resulting in awkward alliances with conservatives. While feminists and conservatives often hold opposing positions, many in both camps bristle against the notion of sexuality as a marketplace good. This joint discomfort with commodified sexuality is particularly evident among those who take stances against sex work, as was the case in the anti-pornography work of the 1980s and 1990s (Dworkin, 1989; MacKinnon, 1987, 1993) and contemporary anti-trafficking activism and legislation (Chapkis, 2005). The APA task force joins this opposition to commodified sexuality by specifically identifying the similarities between mediated (e.g., advertisements) and material (e.g., prostitution) forms of selling sex: "[G]irls and women in prostitution are by definition sexualized—objectified and treated as sexual commodities" (APA, 2007a, p. 17). The language of objectification is then used widely throughout the report to refer to media images and other cultural products.

While feminist scholars and activists generally oppose the concept of sexual objectification, there is no feminist consensus on the issue of what should be done about it. In fact, feminist activists have long recognized both the pleasures and dangers of sexuality (Vance, 1984), articulated most strikingly in the so-called "feminist sex wars" of the 1980s and 1990s. Over the past century in the United States, many feminists have trumpeted liberation from sexual double standards (English, 1983; Jong, 1973; Kamen, 2000; Marks, 2001; Snitow, Stansell, & Thompson, 1983; Tone, 2001), underscored racialized notions of sexualization (Hill-Collins, 1990; Hooks, 1990; Hunt, 1999), and discussed compulsory heterosexuality (Pharr, 1988; Rich, 1980). Others have directly addressed the dangers of patriarchal constraints on female sexuality by focusing on domestic violence, rape,

<sup>4</sup>Stakeholders include, but are not limited to, parents and caretakers, public health researchers and practitioners, feminist activists, criminal justice workers, coaches and teachers, commercial advertisers, religious officials, as well as adolescent girls and boys themselves.

sexual harassment, pornography, sexual trafficking, and more (Dworkin, 1989; Sedgh, Jackson, & Ibrahim, 2005). Still others have pressed past danger arguments about sexuality to focus on female sexual agency and pleasure in heterosexual sex (Jackson, 1996; Segal, 1990), the role that sexual pleasure plays in shaping contraceptive use for pregnancy or HIV and AIDS protection (Higgins, 2007; Higgins & Hirsch, 2007, 2008), and the freedoms associated with alternative sexualities and sexual practices (Bright, 1998, 2000; Califia, 2000).

While recognizing the many dangers that women are subjected to on a global scale, this commentary situates itself on the “pleasure” side of the pleasure–danger continuum. We take this position not as a denial of the dangers many girls and women face domestically and worldwide, nor as a denial of the raced, classed, and sexed inequalities that deeply intersect with the likelihood of girls and women bearing the brunt of these dangers. Rather, we take the position of Wendy Chapkis (1997), who terms “sex as a terrain of struggle, not a fixed field of gender and power relations” (p. 26), and has a “commitment to locating sex within a cultural and political context” (p. 28) while “understanding sex to be a cultural tactic which can be used both to destabilize male power as well as to reinforce it” (p. 29).

In what follows, we first briefly summarize the main claims and findings of the APA report. We then offer a critique of the APA task force’s sexualization thesis, drawing on a wide range of interdisciplinary work on gender, sexuality, and media studies. We conclude with a call for developing a more progressive feminist girl movement on media, sexuality, and sexual health that more fully embraces sexual agency, sexual rights, and sexual health for girls and women.

### Brief Summary of the APA Task Force Report

Working within the parameters of the APA (2007a) charge (quoted earlier), the task force focused on four goals:

To “(a) define sexualization; (b) examine the prevalence and provide examples of sexualization in society and in cultural institutions, as well as interpersonally and intrapsychically; (c) *evaluate the evidence suggestive that sexualization has negative consequences* [italics added] for girls and the rest of society; and (d) describe positive alternatives that may help counteract the influence of sexualization.” (p. 2)

Again, the APA (2007a) task force defines sexualization as a condition that occurs when a person is subjected to at least *one* of the following four conditions:

1. A person’s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics.

2. A person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy.
3. 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.
4. Sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person. (p. 2)

According to the task force, only one of these four factors needs to be present to indicate sexualization. The concept of sexualization is then distinguished from “healthy sexuality,” which the task force describes as “an important component of both physical and mental health, fosters intimacy, bonding, and shared pleasure, and involves mutual respect between consenting partners” (APA, 2007a, p. 2).

The APA report documents that sexualized images of women and girls are prevalent in U.S. culture, particularly in mainstream media (APA, 2007a, p. 5). Further, the authors note that “women and girls are more likely than men and boys to be objectified and sexualized in a variety of media outlets” (APA, 2007b, p. 15). Because of the amount of media consumed by both boys and girls (with an estimate of “6 hours and 32 minutes per day” [APA, 2007a, p. 5]), this naturally increases the “potential for massive exposure to portrayals that sexualize women and girls and teach girls that women are sexual objects” (APA, 2007a, p. 5).

The report’s primary focus and concern is with commercial media and advertising, but it also covers the importance of interpersonal interactions between girls and their parents, teachers, peers, and others. These interactions are said to often reinforce media messages constructing the idea that sexualization is a normal, natural, and unproblematic component of being a girl. At the same time, the task force claims that interpersonal interactions can act as a “protective factor” against sexualization and objectification, a claim that is elaborated on in recommendations to parents and mentors.

After defining sexualization and examining its prevalence, the task force offers a summary of the literature on the negative—and *only* the negative—consequences of the sexualization of girls. Drawing upon several psychological theories<sup>5</sup> to interpret a wide range of empirical evidence on the impact of this negative sexualization, the task force argues that commercial media in particular triggers processes of sexualization and damages girls’ and women’s feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy. The list of negative impacts on girls is examined across six domains: cognitive and physical functioning, body dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety, mental health, physical health, sexuality, and attitudes and beliefs.

<sup>5</sup>Psychological theories include socialization, sociocultural, cognitive, psychoanalytic, and objectification theory.

A central consequence of negative sexualization is said to be self-objectification, where “girls internalize an observer’s perspective on their physical selves and learn to treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated for their appearance” (APA, 2007a, p. 18). Self-objectification is seen as especially damaging when it is connected to negative body image. The task force highlights several studies that demonstrate a link between negative body image and impaired cognitive and physical functioning (APA, 2007a, p. 22). Overall, the task force offers a plethora of evidence to support the thesis that sexualized images and expectations can negatively impact girls’ ability to achieve mental, physical, and sexual health.<sup>6</sup>

The report ends with a series of intervention recommendations for parents, teachers, psychologists, and others. Recommendations include media literacy in schools, encouraging athletics that develop girls’ “body competence” rather than their “body appearance,” extracurricular activities, and comprehensive sexuality education, which can “help youth counteract distorted views presented by the media and culture about girls, sex, and the sexualization of girls” (APA, 2007a, pp. 36–37). Other suggestions are made to parents, who are encouraged to monitor and co-view media with their children, promote religious or spiritual practices, and become media activists. Recommendations are also made for girls and include critical thinking skills or activism “to protest sexualization and to develop critical perspectives on how girls and women are sexualized,” and participation in girl empowerment groups (APA, 2007a, pp. 40–41). The report also includes an extensive list of recommendations for researchers, practitioners, and public policy advocates.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, the *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* (APA, 2007a) substantially contributes to academic, feminist, and political awareness about how sexualization, body objectification and shame, and feminine socialization can damage girls’ and women’s feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Along these lines, the report embraces and is consistent with decades of feminist thought including, but not limited to, work that stands largely on the “danger” side of sexuality debates (e.g., Dworkin, 1997; MacKinnon, 1987) and on the “objectification” side of culture and media debates (Duncan, 1990, 1994; Kilbourne, 1979,

1987; MacNeil, 1994). To build on this important piece of scholarship in a way that recognizes a broader array of feminist theory and interdisciplinary arguments made around gender, media imagery, sexualization, and objectification, we now turn to our critique.

### An Interdisciplinary Feminist Critique of the APA Task Force Report

Despite its scholarly strengths and activist contributions, it is vital to ongoing feminist conversations that some of the foundational assumptions of the APA report be articulated and challenged. Due to these assumptions, we argue that the APA task force report may actually *interfere* with some contemporary feminist goals—in particular, the goals of facilitating sexual agency and pleasure, sexual rights, and sexual health for girls and women. We address these concerns for the remainder of the article by critiquing five components of the APA report: (a) an over-determined, negative impact of sexualization on girls and women; (b) a negation of a large and important feminist literature on media, consumer culture, gender, and the body; (c) a lack of integration with earlier pro-desire feminist psychology scholarship; (d) a conflation of objectification, sexual objectification, and sexualization; (e) an under-emphasis on girls’ and women’s sexual agency and resistance; and (f) an under-emphasis on sexual health and rights.

#### Over-Determined, Negative Impact on Girls and Women

The APA report constructs sexual images and sexualization as uniformly negative, and it accomplishes this in a number of ways. The most obvious way it does this is by excluding any evidence that does not report the negative effects of sexualization or sexualized media on girls and women. Thus, the conclusion that sexualization has only negative impacts does not stem from considering a broad array of evidence; it was a forgone conclusion based on the fact that the task force only “evaluate(s) the evidence suggestive that sexualization has *negative consequences* [italics added] for girls and the rest of society” (APA, 2007a, p. 2). The task force provides no explanation or justification for the systematic exclusion of a potentially large body of theory and evidence that show no effect or even *positive* effects of media images on girls and women.

A second way that the task force bills sexualization as wholly negative results from their generalization about all sexualized images. There is no specification over what counts as a sexualized image and what does not, and whether certain types of images are more harmful to girls and women than others. Situational complexities of the *meanings* of sexualization and sexual imagery are invisible in the report. This brings us to a third way that the task force constructs sexualization as only

<sup>6</sup>The term *sexual health* is not used or developed in the report, but the task force’s concern with girls’ and women’s misconstrued, detached, or passive attitudes toward their own sexuality is clearly in the realm of sexual health scholarship and activism.

<sup>7</sup>Suggestions including urging psychologists to document and analyze the prevalence and impact of sexualization; recommending that the report be included in national standards for high school, college, and graduate school curriculum; calling for the American Psychological Association (APA; 2007a) to “work with Congress and relevant federal agencies and industry to reduce the use of sexualized images of girls in all forms of media and products” (p. 44); and suggesting that the APA and other stakeholders “[d]evelop media awards for positive portrayals of girls as strong, competent, and nonsexualized” (p. 45).

negative: It conflates sexualized images and sexualized (and negative) impacts. In other words, the task force does not sufficiently grapple with the very important distinction in media studies between the *existence* of representations and their subsequent *influence*.

A fourth factor that might contribute to the over-determined negative stance in the report is its reliance on epidemiological terms from medicine and public health such as the “prevalence” and “exposure” to sexualized media. For example, the report notes that “we review evidence concerning the *prevalence* [italics added] of the sexualization of girls and women” (APA, 2007a, p. 3) and “(m)assive *exposure* [italics added] to media among youth creates the potential for massive *exposure* [italics added] to portrayals that sexualize women and girls” (p. 5). Both terms are commonly used in epidemiological assessments that rely on characterizing individual exposures to environmental conditions that produce harmful health outcomes. By deploying epidemiological language, media images are effectively cast as dangerous public health exposures that can create diseased outcomes. While the disease metaphor is compelling, other interpretative models from media studies on gender and the body offer a more complicated picture. We turn to this point next.

### Media, Gender, and the Body

While it may be true that sexualized imagery is increasingly available in more places than ever before, it is simultaneously true that bodily iconography of girls and women have now stretched beyond thin, passive, sexualized ideals to include a broader range of strong, empowered, and muscular bodily ideals than ever before (Bordo, 1993; Dworkin, 2003; Dworkin & Messner, 1999; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Heywood, 1998). The claim that a sexualized trend is increasing must also be read within the context of the aforementioned studies which indicate that, particularly in a post-Title IX environment<sup>8</sup>, empowering images of women are becoming more frequent in mainstream and alternative media.

Since meaning always matters in media studies, it is important to underscore that no mention was made of how girls and women negotiate the claimed new incidence of sexualized iconography as images change over time. Additionally, no discussion was offered in the report of which images “stick” with girls and women

(of the numerous ones that circulate) since assumptions of homogeneous “negative,” “sexualized” imagery are made. Indeed, when considering media studies scholarship on gender and the body, girls and women (along with boys and men) emerge as having a variety of reproductive and resistant reactions to media images (Fiske, 1994; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003; Rand, 1995).

Even more striking is that by focusing solely on the “negative” effects of sexualization, the report leaves out the possibility of intellectually wrestling with how consumer culture now regularly utilizes feminist stances to sell empowering aspects of sexualization to girls and women. Recognized first in a groundbreaking article titled “Commodity Feminism” (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991), and developed further by other feminist researchers, this scholarship articulates the ironies of how post-industrial consumer culture sells girls and women sexualized signifiers through “empowering” ideologies that derive from the gains of second-wave feminist liberation (e.g., feminist and sexualized, smart and sexy; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Goldman et al., 1991). For example, sexual agency, personal independence, and financial well-being are now frequently sold to women as sexualized bodily signifiers to help sell products including sneakers, cigarettes, makeup, clothing, and more (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Goldman et al., 1991). In short, part of why many Western women embrace advertising and media tactics that utilize commodity feminism (e.g., Virginia Slims, Nike’s “Just Do It”) rests on corporate recognition of the empowering gains of second-wave social movements.

Surely, these more ambiguous, varied, or empowering images are a portion of the “6 hours and 32 minutes per day” of American children’s media “exposure” (APA, 2007a, p. 5). However, the authors only claim that increased imagery “naturally increases the potential for massive exposure to portrayals that sexualize women and girls and teach girls that women are sexual objects” (p. 5). While there is no question that it is important to challenge global consumer trends from a variety of social justice positions (including feminist and environmental); nevertheless, girls’ and women’s consumer activities are undoubtedly more complicated than simply “buying into a sexualized image” out of false consciousness (p. 43). Indeed, one of the central gains of the feminist movement includes legitimizing new forms of gender expression and agency for girls and women, including sexual agency.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Title IX was passed in 1972 as a federal law that helped to establish girls’ sports at the high school and collegiate level. Since the passage of Title IX, significant improvements have occurred for girls and women in terms of opportunity to play sports and a corresponding increase in strong and athletic women in movies, magazines, ads, and popular culture (see Dworkin & Messner, 1999; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). The unprecedented inclusion of women in the 1996 Olympics (e.g., “Year of the Woman”) also led to the circulation of a wider array of imagery, some of it sexualized (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003).

<sup>9</sup>In one study highlighted by the task force—a qualitative study of the impact of Western media on girls in Western Fiji (Becker, 2004)—the task force accurately summarized that “[t]hree years after television was introduced, girls’ eating behaviors and attitudes about their bodies had shifted, and rates of disordered eating had increased” (American Psychological Association, 2007a, p. 25). However, the task force neglected to mention the finding that Westernized, sexualized media such as the TV show, *Zena, Warrior Princess*, also inspired Fijian girls to question patriarchy and aspire toward more interpersonal and economic power.

In contrast to the epidemiological terms of “exposure” and “prevalence,” many cultural and media studies scholars prefer terms such as “dominant,” “hegemonic,” or “preferred” to describe the meanings contained in representations in mainstream media (Dworkin & Wachs, 1998; Fiske, 1994; Hall, 1997; Hunt, 1999). Here, cultural and media studies scholars make clear that cultural representations are not only sites for exposure to “disease,” but are imbued with an array of social messages and interpretations that are socially negotiated by people in varied contexts. While terms such as *hegemonic* recognize the widespread presence of certain types of representations over others, what is gained by using these terms is the understanding that images are a site of social power, struggle, and conflict (rather than an over-determined exposure to harm). All images are socially produced within particular contexts for particular purposes, and all images are also socially consumed, navigated, ignored, or subverted within particular contexts for particular purposes. It is only through understanding the contextual meanings of images that one can provide a contextually meaningful critique.

The task force’s apparent assumption that sexualized images all have the same message (or at least the same impact) for all viewers brings us to a related feature of their analysis. While few would dispute that it could be harmful to be “held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy” (the second condition of sexualization), it is not clear from the report who or what is “holding” girls and women to this standard and to what degree there may be variations in appearance standards and norms for both men and women by institutional, regional, and subcultural contexts.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the task force calls for better documentation of the “frequency” of sexualization to “examine whether sexualization is increasing” (APA, 2007a, p. 42). We question what an “increase in sexualization” in media even means given the literature examined earlier. Since one of the central gains of the feminist movement includes new forms of sexualization and sexual agency derived from rejections of traditionally feminine ideals such as sexual passivity, how exactly would researchers discern the difference between different types of sexualized themes and images? A quantitative count of sexualized images will tell us next to nothing about

how girls and women (and boys and men) consume or struggle with such images.

### Feminist Psychology

An additional point of engagement with the main stance of the report is its omission of crucial feminist psychology texts—those that may put a wrench into the current APA report’s sexualization thesis. Despite sharing a disciplinary and ideological home, these foundational and inspirational texts in feminist psychology are relatively invisible in the APA report, and do not appear to explicitly engage its main assumptions. In the feminist psychology scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s, “femininity” (e.g., self-sacrificing, passive behavior) was seen as problematic—femininity was seen literally as “hazardous to her health” (Fine, 1988, p. 48). The antidote, such scholars argued, was “avoiding the simplistic blaming tactics—blaming the victims—blaming the teachers” and laying bare “the missing discourse of girls’ sexual desire” (Tolman, 1994, p. 1).

Undoubtedly, the most prolific and well-cited of these authors is Michele Fine, who was instrumental in critiquing the “anti-sex rhetoric” of sex education in the United States. Fine’s (1988) influential work revealed her disturbance of how girls are disproportionately harmed by anti-sex messages, and urged sexuality educators and scholars to advocate a “genuine discourse of desire”:

A genuine discourse of desire would invite adolescents to explore what feels good and bad, desirable and undesirable, grounded in experiences, needs, and limits. Such a discourse would release females from a position of receptivity, enable an analysis of the dialectics of victimization and pleasure, and would pose female adolescents as subjects of sexuality, initiators as well as negotiators. (p. 33)

Fine (1988) argued that one way of subverting the forces of anti-sex is to break open the common dichotomy around women’s sexual experiences as being either consensual or coercive. This limited conceptual binary, Fine noted, began to be challenged by scholars in the 1980s, when “[n]otions of sexual consent and force, except in extreme circumstances, became complicated, no longer in simple opposition” (p. 41). A paradigm shift occurred when a critical mass of scholars came to the conclusion that “[d]iverse female sexual subjectivities emerge through, despite, and because of gender-based power asymmetries” (p. 41). Unfortunately, the APA report appears to reinforce rather than challenge false dichotomies by focusing only on constraining aspects of sexuality.

The impact of Fine’s (1988) work can be observed in the subsequent generation of feminist psychologists who grapple with such complexity around sexuality,

<sup>10</sup>The American Psychological Association (2007a) task force report is overwhelmingly based on evidence from adult women (many of them college women—hence, likely to be disproportionately from the middle to upper classes) living in the United States (p. 4). The report only briefly mentions any possible racial differences in the sexualization experiences of girls and women (and then only in black-and-white terms), and does not even mention non-heterosexuals until a one-sentence afterthought in the summary: “There is no research to date on lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered youths” (p. 35).

sexualization, and desire, including Deb Tolman, one of the authors of the APA task force report. In Tolman's (1994) article, "Doing Desire, Adolescent Girls' Struggles For/With Sexuality," a pro-desire tone is set by wrestling with the combination of constitutive and oppressive forces at work in any given cultural context. This tone is set with an opening quote from Lorde's (1984) "The Uses of the Erotic as Power":

In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives. (as cited in Tolman, 1994, p. 324)

While Lorde's (1984) work has inspired generations of feminists across disciplinary boundaries, it is important to recognize the importance of Tolman (1994) invoking Lorde's words here. As a "Black feminist, lesbian, poet, mother, warrior" (the Audre Lorde Project), Lorde embodied the intersectionality that many feminists theorists write about—but may or may not experience. Lorde was an activist deeply concerned with racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist systems of oppression; her insistence that the "erotic" is a "source of power and information within our lives" was a radical turn toward using the erotic as a source of personal creativity and passion. Sexuality has historically been a site of control and oppression by those in power against those with less power, but by embracing the personal "erotic," Lorde creates an empowering space for all women to envision and work toward social justice. The erotic, Lorde implied, should not be an interest or hobby only of the privileged, but an essential life tool for women to use to creatively resist and subvert oppression.<sup>11</sup>

Very early into the APA report, the task force gestures toward the pro-desire feminist traditions of Fine, Lorde, and Tolman. This is evident in one quote that paraphrases Tolman's (2002) critique of the barriers to girls understanding and owning their own desires:

Teen girls are encouraged to look sexy, yet they know little about what it means to be sexual, to have sexual desires, and to make rational and responsible decisions about pleasure and risk within intimate relationships that acknowledge their own desires. (APA, 2007a, p. 3)

The task force proceeds to document and critique the ways that "teen girls are encouraged to look sexy," but unfortunately throughout the remainder of the report the second point is dropped entirely: the idea that girls need to "acknowledge their own desires" (APA,

2007a, p. 3). In the scores of suggestions by the APA task force for empowering girls and women, not *one* addresses the need to facilitate girls' ownership of their own sexual desires. As well, the APA report does not even once call activists and scholars to fight for girls' and women's sexual rights.<sup>12</sup> By neglecting agency and desire—focusing instead on the dangers of sexual images, metaphors, and practices—everything sexual appears to become (re)stigmatized for girls. This leads girls, boys, women, and men backwards into seeing sexuality as something that should be veiled from girls and backwards, in general, on the trajectory of feminist work that challenged rigid and essentialist conceptualizations of sex, gender, and sexuality.

In the genealogy of American and Western feminist thought, Fine's challenges to the consensual vs. coercive binary can now be seen as part of a larger transition from second-wave feminist stances of *oppression* to postmodern and "third-wave"<sup>13</sup> feminist stances that acknowledge girls' and women's *agency* more definitively. Although the task force does not locate the report as within either second- or third-wave feminism, the report's language and assumptions about sex, gender, sexuality, and sexual objectification quite firmly situate it within second-wave feminist traditions.

The *omission* of this intellectual shift—away from dichotomous theories of women's sexuality and toward third-wave feminism—allows for a clean analysis of sexualized oppression. However, the APA report's intellectual parsimony also sacrifices the possibility of exploring any paradoxical and subversive connections between sexualization and power.<sup>14</sup> In this way, we see the APA report replicating what Fine (1988) warned us 20 years ago about a "simple opposition" between "consensual" and "coercive" sexuality. Further, while the APA report provides ample evidence for a negative association between body objectification and self-esteem, the report leaves unexamined the question of sexual empowerment as a possible mediating force. Somehow, in the translation of feminist scholarship to the APA report, the baton of bad health was passed from passive feminine norms to "sexualization." However, as we discuss in the following sections, it is possible

<sup>12</sup>See the Appendix for the World Association for Sexual Health's definition of 11 sexual rights.

<sup>13</sup>"Third-wave" feminism conceptualizes structures of privilege and oppression as creating contexts in which some people have more and better options than others, not that any particular, single identity category (e.g., gender, race) is unified or over-determined as victim or oppressor (Heywood & Drake, 1997). Examining the simultaneity of agency and constraint is central to the third wave, where it is understood that contradictory positions arise out of different identity categories.

<sup>14</sup>While Barbie dolls have been criticized for the ways that they leads girls toward being cultural dupes for hyperfeminine actions (that would undermine their empowerment), some research studies have found that Barbie dolls are used by girls in sexually empowering and subversive ways (Quinlan, 1999; Rand, 1995).

<sup>11</sup>It is important to note here that Lorde (1984) was also concerned about sexual objectification, but she seemed to offer erotic power as a means to subvert and reclaim body objectification.



to both embrace sexual power as a goal while also retaining a critique of sexual objectification.

### Objectification ≠ Sexualization

When one person objectifies another, it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to treat that person with empathy. (APA, 2007a, p. 29)

The process of objectification can and does have several negative effects. The extreme ends of this can be seen in war and sport, where objectification of an enemy or the members of an opposing sports team is viewed as necessary to justify physical harm or, in the case of war, extinguishing life. However, in the report there is a frequent reduction of this broad concept of “objectification” into one particular kind of objectification, *sexual* objectification. As a result, it is difficult to isolate whether the mechanism to objectification is only through sexualization, is through sexualization plus other important factors, or if the harmful mechanisms are something else altogether. Without drawing on research that considers alternative sites of the meaning of sexualization and objectification (to identify when these factors coexist and when these are separate, and with what effects), it is difficult to isolate the mechanisms through which harmful effects operate.

For example, a study highlighted by the APA task force reveals a negative relationship between *self-objectification* and girls’ sports performance—in particular, the ability to throw a softball:

...The extent to which girls viewed their bodies as objects and were concerned about their bodies’ appearance predicted poorer motor performance on the softball throw. Self-objectification, it appears, limits the form and effectiveness of girls’ physical movements. (APA, 2007a, p. 22)

The investigators of this particular study, Fredrickson and Harrison (2005), measured self-objectification through three measures: *thoughts while throwing a ball* (how much they thought about their skill vs. how much they thought about how they looked while throwing), *trait objectification* (subjects were asked to rank-order 10 body attributes including health, strength, sex appeal, and physical attractiveness), and *self-objectification* (subjects were asked to list 20 answers to the prompt, “I am \_\_\_”). To increase predictability, these three measures were combined to create one composite measure, which, upon statistical analysis, correlated with lower levels of skill in throwing a ball. While Fredrickson and Harrison’s findings are a testament to the need for supporting girls’ practices of health, strength, and physical fitness and skills, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which *sexualization* impacted the girls’ performance (e.g., it is quite possible that girls were thinking about how they

looked while throwing a ball because they were self-conscious about being studied and watched or their lack of experience). Given this, we question the task force’s prioritization of “*sexualization practices*” as an explanation for some girls’ lack of skill in throwing balls (APA, 2007a, p. 22).<sup>15</sup> Indeed, there is a long history of work that has found “inhibited bodily intentionality” for girls and women in sport due to a variety of structural, cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic factors (e.g., Young, 1990). This larger body of work indicates that sexualization practices are certainly part—but just one part—of the story of how girls and women have been held back in sports skills and participation.

In addition to conflating the concepts of *objectification*, *self-objectification*, *sexual objectification*, and *sexualization*, these phenomena are interchangeably identified by the task force as causing a number of maladies, including body discomfort. This is seen, for example, in the task force’s discussion of a study by Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, and Caruthers (2005), which found that “greater levels of body discomfort and body self-consciousness each predicted lower levels of sexual assertiveness, sexual experience, and condom use self-efficacy, as well as higher levels of sexual risk taking” (APA, 2007a, p. 27). This link between body discomfort and sexual risk taking is an important finding for women’s sexual health advocates; unfortunately, the task force neglects to mention that the body discomfort in this study has little or nothing to do with sexualized media images—rather, this particular study’s focus is on *menstrual* shame, a shame rooted in ancient misogynist ideologies.

Our main point here is that objectification must not be carelessly conflated with sexualization and need not be limited to girls and sexuality. Further, body discomfort and negative self-consciousness can come from several sources, including misogynistic attitudes toward women’s bodies being “dirty” and a lack of practice around specific bodily skills, such as certain types of sports performances. Feminist interventions on these issues might actually include *more* focus on, consciousness of, and perhaps even “objectification” of the body, not less.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>One irony of this study is the extremely objectifying measures used to assess the girls’ throwing techniques. Trait objectification asked respondents to rank order their bodily attributes according to how important these were to an individual’s own self-concept. State self-objectification refers to statements that ranked the ways in which individuals objectified themselves. In addition to these measures, researchers also recorded girls’ leg, arm, and trunk movements while throwing a ball. Researchers rated these movements in a detailed fashion according to bodily “performance” levels (what the standard was that was used to assess performance, we do not know, but perhaps it was male movements?). Thoughts while throwing examined how much girls thought about their looks when they threw a ball. Might the very *process* of participating in such a study create a sense of self-consciousness and self-objectification?

<sup>16</sup>For example, facilitating opportunities for girls and women to appreciate and take pride in their bodily functions; providing opportunities for girls and women to build muscularity and physical skills.

Because objectification comes in different forms and with different meanings, it is important to note the contexts and institutions under which objectification occurs. For example, several contemporary scholars have shown that the institutions of sport and the military encourage men to take instrumental, objectifying attitudes toward their own body in ways that result in a wide variety of negative health consequences to themselves and to other men (Harrison, Chin, & Ficarroto, 1995; Kaufman, 1997; Messner, 1990; Sabo, 1995; Sabo & Gordon, 1995; Young, 1993). There is also growing evidence that American men are nearly as dissatisfied about their bodies as women and experience depression and self-esteem problems that are partly due to gendered cultural standards, some of which are produced by media (Grogan, 1999; Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2004; Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, & Borowiecki, 1999; Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). Men also receive a wide variety of objectifying messages about their bodies that emphasize sexual “performance” and lead to sexual anxieties and dysfunctions (Brod, 1995; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Fracher & Kimmel, 1995).<sup>17</sup>

Our point here is not to argue that men have it “just as bad” as women. Our point is conceptual: by focusing only on girls and without considering how gender operates relationally within and across institutional and cultural sites, numerous questions remain. Is it objectification that is harmful? Sexualization? Or both? If so, what *kinds* of objectification and sexualization are harmful, and under what conditions? When boys and men are objectified, does this always hinge less on sexualization than for girls and women? Are boys’ and men’s objectification structured differently than girls’ and women’s since men’s objectification may be combined with reward structures and masculine ideals that are disproportionately harmful or deadly (e.g., 100% injury rates in the National Football League, deaths in the military; Courtenay, 2000a, 2000b; Sabo & Gordon, 1995)? More important to a feminist analysis of girl’s and women’s sexuality, under what conditions might sexualization contain agency and resistance? Can desire play any role in sexualization? If one self-constitutes as an object of desire through sexiness, is this a sign of oppression? Under what conditions would this *not* be a sign of oppression? Such critical questions are absent from the APA report but, as we detail later, common in other literatures.

<sup>17</sup>If G. I. Joe was human, his chest and bicep muscles would have grown exponentially over the past few decades. In his 1964 version, he would be 5’ 10”, with a 44-in. chest, 32-in. waist, and 12-in. biceps; by 1991, he would have a 29-in. waist with 16½-in. biceps; by the mid 1990s, he would sport a 55-in. chest and 27-in. biceps, almost as big as his 29-in. waist (see Pope et al., 1999; Pope et al., 2000).

### Interdisciplinary Insights on Sexualization, Sexual Agency, and Resistance

Critical questions surrounding the contextual meanings of sexual objectification and sexualization have been addressed by many feminist researchers; this camp of scholars often start by critiquing the assumption that girls and women cannot or do not exhibit sexual agency. For example, German sociologist Frigga Haug, in her 1987 work entitled *Female Sexualization*, wrote:

... Girls are said to be accounted for by these theories—and yet they barely make an appearance. On the other hand, if and when they do appear... they surface only as objects of various different agencies... which are seen to act upon them and force them into a particular range of roles. The question of how individuals make certain modes of behavior their own, how they learn to develop one particular set of needs as opposed to certain others, is never addressed. (p. 24)

Based on her examination of women’s stories termed “body projects” (e.g., doing their hair, shaving their legs, and choosing fashion trends), Haug argued that women engage in an extensive process of subjectivity (not necessarily harm and force) in their own process of sexualization:

Women are not only objects of male desire: they themselves play a part in their creation as such. To see femininity in this way is to identify a subjective aspect within being-as-object, and thus effectively to recognize the inadequacy of the subject-object metaphor... (p. 131)

By recognizing the identity-validating and pleasurable aspects of sexualization, Haug (1987) and other scholars (including the feminist psychologists cited earlier) have launched an entirely parallel line of reasoning to the APA report, moving well beyond traditional claims of male subjectivity and female objectivity, the harmful effects of objectification, and connotations of sexuality with objectification (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003; Miller, 2001).<sup>18</sup>

In addition to these interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives, what distinguishes these authors from many researchers cited in the APA report is that they are less interested in generalizing to an entire category of people (e.g., all women), then they are in examining the institutional and sociocultural contexts under which sexualizing practices may have varied impacts. Examples of this kind of work can be found in analyses of

<sup>18</sup>For example, in their analysis of male and female fitness magazines, Dworkin and Wachs (2009) argued that traditional subject-object and male-female dichotomies are no longer adequate given that these have been partly broken down in image and text. In one of the first relational gender analyses of over 10 years of health and fitness magazines, they found that there is an increase over time in the trend toward the objectification of men.

sex work (Chapkis, 1997; Frank, 2002), sport (Miller, 2001), fitness (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009), service work (Lerum, 2004; van Leuven, 1998), and sexuality studies (Dowsett, 2004; Halberstam, 1998; Rubin, 1984, 2002). Such positions are also consistent with scholars who view (White, middle class, and especially girl) children solely as sites of innocence and purity. Recent sexuality scholarship challenges notions of childhood innocence by underscoring children's agency and children's sexuality so long as there is not an adult violating them and deciding for them (e.g., Fields, 2005; Kaye, 2005; Schaffner, 2005).

One explanation for the dearth of sexual agency literature in psychology may have to do with disciplinary funding streams; since scholarship traditions in psychology and public health have traditionally been framed in terms of "risk" and "danger" rather than "resilience" and "pleasure," this translates into systematic publication bias in terms of the sort of research that is funded and published (Higgins & Hirsch, 2007). Hence, even if the APA task force had taken into account neutral or positive examples of sexualization, they probably would not have found much in the psychological literature. One exception to this is a recent study by psychologists Breines, Crocker, and Garcia (2008), which showed that women who have high self-esteem and who are high in trait appearance-contingent self-worth (e.g., they derive a sense of self-worth from their appearance) report increased daily well-being when they self-objectify.

Ultimately, however, it is not the lack of available studies but the narrow definitions and conflated assumptions throughout the APA report that result in a lack of recognition of girls' and women's sexual agency and resistance. Since sexual agency is a critical component of sexual health and sexual rights, we turn to the issue of sexual health as our final arena of critique.

### "Healthy Sexuality" Versus Sexual Health

As noted earlier, the APA report contrasts *sexualization* with healthy sexuality, which "... fosters intimacy, bonding, and shared pleasure, and involves mutual respect between consenting partners" (APA, 2007a, p. 2). This is an important emphasis and appears to follow recent advances and public health commitments to pursue the goal of "sexual health" (Higgins & Hirsch, 2007).

At the same time, we suspect that an ideological gulf may exist between the APA's (2007a) concept of healthy sexuality and the more widely recognized concept of sexual health. For one, the APA's version of healthy sexuality seems to rely on the existence of a sexual partner: ("intimacy, bonding...shared pleasure... mutual respect between consenting partners," p. 2). In contrast, the concept of sexual health is often explicitly tied to a rubric of *individual* sexual rights

(some of which may apply to both children and adults).<sup>19</sup> Originally developed by the World Association for Sexual Health and now widely recognized (and modified) by other organizations including the World Health Organization, the concept of sexual rights may include the right to sexual pleasure (not necessarily with another person), the right to emotional sexual expression (including self-sexualization), and the right to sexually associate freely.<sup>20</sup>

While healthy sexuality—or a mutually respectful, pleasurable, and consensual sexual relationship—is a desire for many Western girls and women, it is also an ideal that may implicitly exclude other options and innovations, whether these are created out of desire (e.g., polyamory, swinging, online sex, sexual role playing, celibacy) or pragmatic necessity (e.g., celibacy, some forms of sex work). The exclusion (and degradation) of sexual alternatives for consenting adults may not be the intention of the task force, but without an affirmation of both girls' and women's sexual rights, the APA task force may be inadvertently reinforcing the "charmed circle of sexuality"—a term coined and critiqued by Rubin (1984) to describe how the ideal of White, "vanilla," private, monogamous heterosexual couplehood (and the exclusion or stigmatization of other variations) upholds a classist, racist, patriarchal, and heterosexist social order.

Perhaps the APA task force could have distanced itself from this charmed circle had it considered the possibility that some forms of self-generated sexualization (some of which may come from viewing sexualized images) may actually nurture the development of sexual health. However, with only negative cases considered, we are left to conclude that girls and women cannot hope to benefit from sexual self-presentations and representations, and that this will inevitably lead to an "unhealthy" sexuality.

While the previous assumptions are consistent throughout the task force report, at times these hit up against unacknowledged paradoxes. For example, citing Wolf's (1991) *The Beauty Myth* analysis, the task force reported that "[w]hereas yesterday's culture may have equated 'domesticity' with attractiveness in women, today's culture equates 'sexy' with attractiveness" (APA, 2007a, p. 18). This quote was used to help make the task force's case against sexualization without any further analysis or historical contextualization. In truth, the global story of women becoming more publicly sexual is not a simple story of oppression, as it developed in part as a result of women moving from

<sup>19</sup>The concept of individual sexual rights is also problematic, rooted in Western neo-liberal assumptions about personhood, but we still find this to be a more promising approach for girls and women.

<sup>20</sup>For the World Health Organization's ongoing discussion and "working definition" of sexual health and sexual rights, see [http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/gender/sexual\\_health.html#4](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/gender/sexual_health.html#4)

economic dependency and domesticity to economic and sexual independence (Barlow et al., 2005).

The irony of historical associations between women's economic independence, sexual independence, and sexualization is not lost on conservative Christian commentator Joseph D'Agostino (2007). In his review of the APA task force report for the arch conservative pro-life Population Research Institute (and in his subsequent interview with the right-wing National Catholic Register), D'Agostino contemptuously placed full blame for the sexualization of girls on feminists:

Of course, feminists have always deplored domesticity. . . . Back in the bad ol' pre-feminist days, when women were so oppressed, teen girls were concerned with getting better grades and improving their social graces. Now, they want to look hot. Write Gloria Steinem today and thank her for what's she done for America's girls. (p. 39).

Dozens of other conservative Christian organizations also publicized the report as evidence of the harms that come to girls and women when they display or are exposed to sexuality outside of the patriarchal heterosexual family (which they see as the only source of "healthy" sexuality). While religious conservatives and academics alike are entitled to their own sexual morality, academics must do better to articulate the mechanisms by, and the conditions under, which sexualization is "unhealthy."

### Toward a Feminist Sexual Health and Rights Approach

While the task force makes a strong case that a lot of bad things happen to girls and women when they feel bad about their bodies, upon review of a wider array of interdisciplinary feminist literature it becomes clear that there are *multiple* pathways to negative mental and physical health effects. Mainstream media and sexualization are not the only culprits; in some cases, they may even bolster the feminist team (Ward, Day, & Epstein, 2006). We propose that feminist psychologists and other feminist scholars move toward more specificity in defining their assumptions and goals around sexuality and gender, with an eye toward how historical, social, and economic contexts intersect with these assumptions and goals. In particular, given the fact that global systems of oppression routinely work through sexualized dominance, it is crucial that feminist conversations about sexuality directly assess how various theoretical assumptions support or undermine the goals of sexual agency and pleasure, sexual rights, and sexual health for girls and women. Sounding the alarms on sexualization without providing space for sexual rights results in a setback for girls and women and for feminist theory, and is also at odds with the growing consensus of global health scholars.

Furthermore, while we deeply appreciate the APA task force's move toward public scholarship and activism, we are concerned that some of the task force's suggested mechanisms for challenging body objectification and shame are the same mechanisms that can harm girls and women. For example, religious leaders can be helpful in intervening with girls' sexualization when they "insist . . . that girls be allowed to remain girls and not be pushed into a precocious sexuality" (APA, 2007a, p. 38). However, since several religious traditions are also *hostile* to the idea of sexual and bodily efficacy for girls and women, for some girls and women religion is what they need to *escape*, not to turn to, to find comfort in and acceptance of their bodies.

For another example, the task force recommends that parents should "comment on appropriate and inappropriate content while watching TV with their children" as this "can alter the influence of the messages" (APA, 2007a, p. 38). Since parents have an enormous range of opinions as to what is "appropriate" and "inappropriate" sexuality, and since the task force does not define the difference, should parents, educators, and religious leaders conclude that *all* sexual content is inappropriate? If a movie portrays a teenage girl lusting after (sexually objectifying) another girl, is this "inappropriate" and, if so, why? Without a better articulation of how the conditions and contexts of sexualization impact its meaning, the take-home message for many readers may simply be that sexual images are inherently dangerous and should be avoided, resisted, and organized into anti-sex political campaigns. We doubt that this is neither is the position of all of the task force members nor of the larger membership body of the APA. If the consensus is not that sexual imagery is inherently bad, then far more work is necessary to move beyond platitudes of "appropriate" and "inappropriate" sexualized media images.

Once a broader scope of interdisciplinary theory is incorporated, such as the frames we have suggested throughout this article, the analysis of girlhood and sexualization becomes much more complex than suggested by the APA report. In broadening our theoretical scope beyond a singular emphasis and discipline, it becomes clear that the meanings of sexualization (and sexuality) can only be understood within particular institutional, cultural, and interpersonal contexts. In one context, a sexualized process may lower self-esteem; in another context, it may boost it. From this perspective, the point is not to take a stand that sexualization is "good" or "bad," but rather to understand the conditions under which it produces "good" or "bad" effects. Without a clear contextual analysis or articulation of guiding principles, the APA task force report emanates a perspective and tone (perhaps unintended) that reinforces rather than challenges sex-negative and socially conservative assumptions around sexuality and girlhood. We can do better than this. Feminism owes this to girls and women.

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## Appendix

The World Association for Sexual Health defines sexual rights as follows<sup>a</sup>:

1. The right to sexual freedom: Sexual freedom encompasses the possibility for individuals to express their full sexual potential. However, this excludes all forms of sexual coercion, exploitation and abuse at any time and situations in life.
2. The right to sexual autonomy, sexual integrity, and safety of the sexual body: This right involves the ability to make autonomous decisions about one's sexual life within a context of one's own personal and social ethics. It also encompasses

control and enjoyment of our own bodies free from torture, mutilation, and violence of any sort.

3. The right to sexual privacy: This involves the right for individual decisions and behaviors about intimacy as long as they do not intrude on the sexual rights of others.
4. The right to sexual equity: This refers to freedom from all forms of discrimination regardless of sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, race, social class, religion, or physical and emotional disability.
5. The right to sexual pleasure: Sexual pleasure, including autoeroticism, is a source of physical, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual well-being.
6. The right to emotional sexual expression: Sexual expression is more than erotic pleasure or sexual acts. Individuals have a right to express their sexuality through communication, touch, emotional expression, and love.
7. The right to sexually associate freely: This means the possibility to marry or not, to divorce, and to establish other types of responsible sexual associations.
8. The right to make free and responsible reproductive choices: This encompasses the right to decide whether or not to have children, the number and spacing of children, and the right to full access to the means of fertility regulation.
9. The right to sexual information based on scientific inquiry. This right implies that sexual information should be generated through the process of unencumbered and yet scientifically ethical inquiry and disseminated in appropriate ways at all societal levels.
10. The right to comprehensive sexuality education: This is a lifelong process from birth throughout the life cycle and should involve all social institutions.
11. The right to sexual health care: Sexual health care should be available for prevention and treatment of all sexual concerns, problems, and disorders.

<sup>a</sup>Source: World Association for Sexual Health.