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The Prevention of Sexualization of Girls

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THE PREVENTION OF
SEXUALIZATION OF GIRLS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Abstract

Sexualization can affect individuals of all ages, colors, sexualities, and genders. Sexualization may affect women and girls more commonly and intensely, however. Sexualization occurs when one's value is placed solely on their appearance. Sexualization has been observed to happen through two main sources: the media and interpersonal relationships. Consequently, a third source may arise when girls internalize the sexualization. It has been demonstrated that sexualization can have negative and positive consequences for adolescent girls. Though sexualization may have positive consequences, such as sexual agency, the negative consequences seem to outweigh them. Despite the amount of attention this topic has received, there seems to be a lack of literature exploring ways to prevent or decrease sexualization among girls. However, research has shown that awareness-increasing interventions have been effective in changing health-related behaviors. The present study searched for common themes among previous awareness-increasing interventions. The results indicated 3 common themes: education, training, and monitoring. It is possible, then, that an intervention designed to increase awareness of sexualization, train the targets skills necessary for challenging sexualizing messages, and monitoring their progress could reduce sexualization. Finding a way to decrease sexualization aimed at adolescent girls could make more girls realize that their worth does not just lie within their appearance and not allow people to treat them as such.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	2
SEXUALIZATION: EXPLAINED	2
PREVENTING SEXUALIZATION	11
PRESENT STUDY	14
METHODS AND MATERIALS	14
RESULTS	15
DISCUSSION	19
PROPOSED INTERVENTION	19
CONCLUSION.....	23
REFERENCES.....	24

Introduction

As children become adolescents, they undergo many changes; perhaps the most drastic change is becoming a sexual being. During this discovery of sexuality, sexual health can easily be distorted. Sexualization may be a part of that distortion. The American Psychological Association (APA) assembled a Task Force in response to the public's concern about increased sexualization, specifically among girls (APA Task Force of the Sexualization of Girls, 2007). Since the publication of the report, there seems to have been a spike in attention, literature, and studies on the sexualization of different people, such as men, women, sexual minorities, and people of color (APA, 2007; Moradi et al., 2019; Moscatelli et al., 2021). Though psychologists, sociologists, and other researchers have aimed to uncover and explain every aspect of sexualization, there is a lack of evidence on how it can be prevented or even decreased.

Although anyone can be sexualized, this thesis focuses mostly on adolescent girls, specifically from the ages 14-18. This paper first covers a literature review on sexualization, which is broken down into its definition, impact, and a few recommended preventative actions. The paper then dives into common components or themes among other effective awareness-increasing interventions. Finally, the paper ends with a suggested intervention, using the identified themes, to target sexualization specifically.

Literature Review

Sexualization: Explained

What is Sexualization?

Sexualization has taken on many definitions. The most widely known definition is the one made by the APA Task Force. According to the Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007), sexualization is defined as when a person's value is solely based on their sex appeal, a person's attractiveness is equated with being sexy, a person is sexually objectified, or when sexuality is enforced on a person. Only one of these four conditions needs to be present for an experience to be considered sexualization. The Task Force also observed that sexualization stems from three interrelated sources: the media, interpersonal relationships, and by the self. Although this is evident, it seems as though there are two main sources, the media and interpersonal relationships, and the self is a secondary source that occurs as a result of the main sources. They sought to uncover the existence of sexualization in our society, its negative consequences on girls, and a few ways to counteract the issue (APA, 2007). The report was not without its critics, however.

Other researchers, including sociologists and feminists, have found a few weaknesses in the APA report. Critics argued that the report refused to assess the positive consequences that sexualization provides to girls (Lerum & Dworkin, 2009). For example, sexualization is theorized to be an essential part of experiencing and developing a sexual agency for girls (Vanwesenbeek, 2009). Critics also emphasized that the report primarily used non-inclusive evidence from mostly white, heterosexual adult women to make conclusions and generalizations about all girls. Critics stressed the need for more evidence involving sexual minority and racial minority girls (Gill, 2012; Hatch, 2011). In addition, according to Vanwesenbeek (2009), the

report failed to quantify or measure sexualization. This author claimed that the frequency and intensity of the sexualizing source could have greater or lesser consequences on girls, which could be negative or positive. Lastly, critics disagreed with the Task Force when they defined sexualization as experiencing sexual objectification or when they are equated with each other (Lerum & Dworkin, 2009). Many articles have been published with the two terms used interchangeably. However, there have been several other studies and scales used to measure them individually and relatively, thus assuming two different constructs.

What is Sexual Objectification?

Sexual objectification is a similar yet distinct construct from sexualization. In Fredrickson and Roberts' Objectification Theory (1997), sexual objectification is defined as dehumanizing a person down to an object and treating them as such for one's sexual desires. Perhaps surprisingly, one can be sexually objectified without being sexualized, and vice versa. That is, one can be reduced to an object for others' sexual pleasure without their value being placed solely on their looks or sex appeal. Likewise, one can have their value placed solely on their appearance without being reduced to an object. Grower and Ward (2021) explained that women can still enjoy themselves when sexualized because "women who are sexualized by romantic partners may still feel valued as a whole," (p. 65). However, Fasoli et al. (2017) concluded from their study that participants' sexually objectified thoughts increased as models developed a more sexualized pose. In other words, it was shown that sexualization often led to an increase in sexual objectification.

It seems that most researchers and professionals agree that being sexually objectified can only lead to negative consequences as opposed to positive ones. According to Papadaki (2007), feminists' views on sexuality and objectification are founded on the ideas of philosopher

Immanuel Kant, one of the central Enlightenment thinkers. This author presented Kant's ideas and elaborated on the perspectives of three other feminists: Catharine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, and Martha Nussbaum. Papadaki (2007) explained that of the four, Nussbaum was the only one who thought there was a way in which sexual objectification could potentially establish in a person a "wonderful' element of sexual life," (p. 341). Nevertheless, Nussbaum still recognizes that being sexually objectified is more likely to do more harm than good. On the same note, Grower and Ward (2021) mentioned that studies measuring self-objectification mainly found negative consequences toward women's sexual well-being, whereas studies featuring self-sexualization found a mix of null, negative, and positive associations with women's well-being.

Sexualization In the Media

As assessed by the Task Force (APA, 2007), sexualization is derived from three interrelated sources. The first identified source is the media. The media is vast, widespread, and highly influential. According to Lamb and Koven (2019), adolescents spend, on average, 9-11 hours a day on the media. The media is full of sexualizing portrayals, images, and messages. Perhaps the most concerning is when there are sexualizing images of girls younger than 18. Nevertheless, adolescent girls may still be equally impacted when viewing sexualizing content of women. Sexualized portrayals of women are found in 45.5% of young female characters on prime-time television and 50% of female characters on reality programs (Ward, 2016). In advertisements, 22% of TV commercials and 64.1% of ads in adolescent magazines portray women in a sexualizing manner (Ward, 2016). In addition, "A study of the 100 top-grossing films of 2008 in the U.S. found that 39.8% of 13- to 20-year-old female characters wore sexually revealing attire and 30.1% appeared partially nude (compared to 6.7% and 10.3% of male characters, respectively; Smith & Choueiti, 2011)," said Bigler, Tomasetto, and McKenny (2019;

p.531). The sexualization of girls and women can also be found in music videos, social media, and products like clothing and video games (APA, 2007; Lamb & Koven, 2019).

It is crucial to understand how the media influences adolescent girls. Gill (2012) argues that the media may not as easily influence girls as other scholars may illustrate. Gill (2012) found in their sample that girls aged 10-13 were active consumers of the media. This author explained that the girls were far from passively imitating the media and could challenge sexualizing content. On the other hand, Hartley, Wight, and Hunt (2014) found that their sample, aged 13-15, reported that the media influenced their perceptions of gender-appropriate romantic and sexual relationships. For example, the girls of the sample adopted the stereotype from the media that boys are sexually active and prefer short-term relationships and girls who are “shaggable.” Bleakly et al. (2009) also found that 57% of adolescents in their sample, more commonly females, thought the media was an important source of sexual knowledge. Furthermore, girls have demonstrated a lack of interaction with sexualizing counter-messages (messages or videos in which sexualization is criticized) on social media (Oosten, 2021). Although these studies do not show that the media directly influences adolescents to adopt sexualizing messages and behaviors, they still demonstrate the extent to which the media influences adolescents about sexual themes. More evidence is needed to determine if the media influences adolescents, specifically the ideals that follow the sexualization of girls and women. Some girls may be more susceptible to media influence than others. Considering that sexualization in the media influences girls, it would be imperative to know if it positively or negatively influences them. In other words, does the sexualization of women and girls on the media promote sexual agency or does it increase the internalization of sexualization for female viewers? Another question that is slightly unrelated but just as important to ask is if the

sexualization of women and girls on the media encourage male viewers to treat women in their lives the same way. It is possible that sexualization through interpersonal relationships impact girls more than the media (Trekels & Eggermont, 2021).

How Friends and Family Contribute to Sexualization

The APA's (2009) second source of sexualization is through one's interpersonal relationships with peers, family, and teachers. As adolescents go through puberty, they are experiencing something new and exciting. During this period, they start their journey of self-discovery, which includes learning how to be a sexual being. However, this path can sometimes be distorted and allow adolescents to take on perverse ideas and misconceptions about sexuality. One of those perverse ideas may be that sexualizing women and girls is acceptable. Boys may sexualize girls or girls may sexualize each other or themselves. According to Bigler, Tomasetto, and McKenny (2019), the strongest predictor of popularity among elementary students was physical attractiveness for girls and athleticism for boys. Girls from a young age are rewarded with popularity for being attractive. Trekels and Eggermont (2021) suggested that "When peers express their support for the prevalent ideals of beauty (American Psychological Association, 2007), adolescents learn that fitting the ideal mold might increase their acceptance among peers (Trekels & Eggermont, 2017b). In other words, peer interactions can reinforce the influence of media portrayals" (p. 34-35). In addition to girls being praised for their looks, however, there may be other areas of interaction between peers that foster sexualization, such as sexual harassment. The APA (2009) found a study by the American Association of University Women where 63% of girls reported being sexually harassed "often" or "occasionally." Of those girls, 90% reported the harassment came from a student and 45% reported harassment from a former student. Liss et al. (2011) identified one study that suggested sexualization is related to sexual

harassment, as they both work to exploit women. By definition, sexual harassment is sexualization as they both occur when sexuality is inappropriately enforced on a person. Sexual harassment, by its nature, reduces the victim to their appearance or sexual function.

In addition to peers, parents may unintentionally teach their daughters to sexualize themselves and their sons to sexualize others (Bigler, Tomasetto, and McKenny, 2019). This is observed to happen through modeling. Bigler et al. (2019) used the example of a father telling their son to “check out” an attractive female. Starr and Ferguson (2012) explained that mothers teach their daughters the importance of upholding beauty standards. Mothers may do this by applying makeup to themselves in front of their daughters. Furthermore, girls perceived high importance of thin ideals and body-related behaviors (i.e., dieting and disordered eating) when their mother revealed opinions of her own body and messages about appearance (Starr & Ferguson, 2012). It is important for parents to be aware of what ideas and attitudes they are teaching their children. Girls who are taught beauty standards from their mothers may be more susceptible to allowing peers to sexualize them.

Self-Sexualization and Self-Objectification

Girls are taught from a young age the importance of their appearance through social learning. As a result, girls often internalize the idea that looks are the most important thing (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Self-sexualization occurs when a person views themselves as if their appearance holds the greatest value. For example, girls who self-sexualize may worry more about their appearance in school rather than the academic lessons being taught to them. Self-objectification is very similar. It occurs when a person views themselves as an object and, thus, allows others to treat them as such (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Self-sexualization and self-objectification seem to be both consequences of being sexualized/objectified and a source of

further sexualization/objectification. These things occur as a result of being sexualized and objectified by the media and interpersonal relations, and they also work in conjunction with the two external sources (Liss et al., 2011). The negative consequences of sexualization begin to arise once girls internalize sexualization.

Negative Consequences of Sexualization

Studies examining sexualization are becoming increasingly important as more questions begin to arise, specifically questions about its effect on girls. Unfortunately, most research studies that examine the effects of sexualization are conducted using adult participants. Nevertheless, these studies could still aid in recognizing the similarities between negative consequences in adult women and girls.

It is important to note all the factors that go into how girls can develop issues related to sexualization. Most studies were able to account for some of the variables but not all variables at once. Some factors pertain to the individual, and other factors pertain to the sexualizing experience. Factors concerning the individual include gender, age, race, and sexuality (Fasoli et al. (2017). Furthermore, some girls and women are more prone to build resilience toward sexualization than others (Moradi et al., 2019). As for the sexualizing experience, the severity of the negative consequences may vary based on the frequency and intensity with which the individual witnessed or personally experienced it (Vanwesenbeek, 2009). Women and girls may suffer greater consequences if they experience more frequent and intense sexualizing experiences.

The negative consequences of sexualization for girls are significant. According to Lamb and Koven (2019), negative consequences of sexualization found in girls include self-sexualization and sexist and rape-supportive attitudes. Self-sexualization occurs when an

individual begins to prioritize their appearance over other important qualities such as their desires, mental health, or physical health/function (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Girls who self-sexualize tend to wear more revealing or tight clothing, have higher levels of body surveillance, and have higher levels of body shame (Lamb & Koven, 2019). Grabe and Hyde (2009) state that high body surveillance predicts poor body image, depression, and anxiety in girls. McKenny and Bigler (2016) found in a study of 91 10- to 14-year-olds that higher levels of internalized sexualization correlated with lower grades and standardized test scores. Another negative consequence mentioned by Lamb and Koven (2019) is that sexualization affirms sexist and rape-supportive attitudes in girls. Exposure to sexualization teaches boys to think that treating their partners as *less* is acceptable. In the same way, girls become conditioned to accept sexist treatment from their partners. Liss et al. (2011) also found that self-sexualizing behaviors were related to hostile sexism and hyperfemininity. Furthermore, girls who increased their use of pornography showed higher levels of hyperfemininity (Kelin, Sevic, Kohut, & Stulhofer, 2022) and were more susceptible to believing rape myths (Lamb & Koven, 2019). Despite these negative consequences of sexualization, other professionals argue that sexualization can also provide positive consequences to women and girls.

Controversies of Sexualization

It has been debated throughout the literature that sexualization is either beneficial, detrimental, or both for women and girls. Some feminists believe that sexualization sexually empowers women and girls (Peterson, 2010). Others claim that sexual health is unobtainable without sexualization (Vanwesenbeek, 2009). Sexual empowerment is said to foster positive consequences for women and girls, such as autonomy, self-esteem, and increasing one's sexual arousal and satisfaction (Vanwesenbeek, 2009). Feelings of sexual empowerment stem from the

enjoyment of sexualization. Enjoyment of sexualization is when women or girls find sexualization from men pleasurable and rewarding (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011). Research shows that women who self-sexualize are more likely to enjoy sexualization (Riemer et al., 2020). Complimentary, or positively seen, sexualization leads women to experience heightened self-esteem. Enjoyment of sexualization may also lead to sexual agency. Sexual agency is when one feels comfortable conveying their sexual preferences, boundaries, desires, and expectations and when one feels entitled to giving and receiving sexual pleasure (Kelin et al., 2022). For example, Grower and Ward (2021) found that in women, enjoyment of sexualization positively correlated with entitlement to sexual pleasure and higher sexual esteem. In another study, Kelin et al. (2022) hypothesized that exposure to sexually explicit material (SEM) would either teach girls sexual agency or to please men with little to no regard for themselves. Their results indicated that SEM teaches girls both.

A significant amount of evidence points to the idea that sexualization produces positive consequences. However, others believe that sexualization provides false hope for women and girls, contributing to greater negative consequences (Barnett, Maciel, & Gerner, 2018). It seems that the enjoyment of sexualization found in women is rooted in external factors. In attempts to follow beauty standards, women put a lot of time and effort into being socially accepted as beautiful. Complimentary sexualization could serve as a reward for such efforts. This creates a cycle where women constantly search for that reward and acceptance by continuing to abide by beauty standards (Grower & Ward, 2021). This cycle indicates social control rather than sexual empowerment. Breines, Crocker, and Garcia (2008, as cited in Barnett et al., 2018) concluded that boosted self-esteem results from the enjoyment of sexualization. However, that boost was proven to be temporary and had no long-term, lasting effects. This is perhaps because their self-

esteem stems from external factors, like male attention, rather than from within. In addition, Barnett, Maciel, and Gerner (2018) found that the enjoyment of sexualization was positively correlated with conservative attitudes. Women who enjoy sexualization are more likely to self-sexualize and, therefore, adopt traditional feminine norms such as putting their sexual partner's desires above their own. Furthermore, in one of Liss et al. (2011)'s scales, they found that the item "It is important to me that men are attracted to me" is more associated with the enjoyment of sexualization than the item "I feel empowered when I look beautiful." This may indicate that the enjoyment of sexualization stems from positive attention from men than from positive assessments of themselves.

It's important to note that many of these positive consequences occur in relation to the enjoyment of sexualization. Women who enjoy sexualization tend to only like one kind of sexualization, complimentary rather than critical (Riemer et al., 2020). Even then, women must evaluate the complimentary sexualizing source. Depending on who the sexualizing source is, women may or may not enjoy it. With such limitations to the extent to which women enjoy being sexualized, it is possible that very little, if any, sexualization benefits women or girls in a positive manner.

Preventing Sexualization

As researchers learn more about how sexualization impacts girls, it is important to consider ways to prevent sexualization or at least decrease unfavorable kinds of sexualization, such as critical sexualization. Influencing the actions of the media and others may not be as effective as targeting the girls directly, as the latter approach may produce better and quicker results. Even so, targeting girls would not decrease or prevent sexualization; instead, it would alter the impact sexualization has on girls.

Interventions that target girls may include monitoring their media usage and consumption, media literacy programs, and sex education programs. Many girls spend about the same time viewing media as they do to sleeping (Lamb & Koven, 2019). There are plenty of ways in which parents could take the initiative to decrease the amount of sexualization that reaches their children through the media. Parents could limit their child's media use, monitor the contents of media their child is consuming, and actively teach their children to be aware of sexualized messages on the media (APA, 2007; Lamb & Koven, 2019). In addition, Klein et al. (2011) suggests implementing media literacy programs for young people. These programs aim to create active interpreters of the media rather than passive consumers (APA, 2007). This would foster critical thinking skills in children, which would allow the children to challenge sexualizing messages in the media. Girls have already started utilizing the media to resist sexualization, such as reclaiming the word "slut," expressing female desires, and fighting against sexual violence (Lamb & Koven, 2019; Roberts, 2013). Another way to possibly decrease sexualization or teach girls to resist sexualization is through sex education programs. The programs could help girls learn how to understand and navigate through healthy sexuality and counter contradictory sexual messages (Lamb & Koven, 2019). Klein et al. (2022) believes that girls with stronger hyperfemininity would benefit the most from the programs because it could help girls learn how to develop the skills needed to communicate their desires and expectations. It is important to note, however, that Hatch (2011) does not believe sex education programs will have a big enough impact as it "lack[s] a rigorous scientific basis" (p. 205). Instead, Hatch (2011) believes it would be more beneficial to treat the damages of sexualization through a mental health model.

Many of these preventative actions toward sexualization directly focus on girls. Although that is very important, it's also crucial to focus on others. For example, parents should also

monitor what their boys consume on the internet or what they may be contributing to it. Boys could also participate in media literacy or sex education programs. Well-designed programs may help boys learn to value themselves and others as a whole, not just on appearance. These programs could also teach boys to combat sexualizing content to prevent them from internalizing it or sexualizing others. Ultimately, however, these are all suggestions that have yet to be studied or proven effective.

Present Study

The present study looks to examine awareness-increasing interventions for targets other than preventing sexualization. A minimum of three such interventions will be selected for analysis. Common themes among these interventions will be identified and applied to create a novel intervention with the aim of decreasing sexualization. Although there are many suggestions for interventions that might decrease sexualization throughout the literature (i.e., monitoring children or media literacy programs), there is a lack of research to indicate the effectiveness of such suggestions. Future researchers could test the effectiveness of the intervention that is recommended by the present study.

Methods and Materials

This author searched through the University of Central Florida (UCF) Library's general collection and the EBSCO Host "APA PsycInfo" database to identify awareness-increasing interventions that aim to change health-related behaviors. In the search, the keywords "interventions," "health interventions," "awareness-increasing interventions," "awareness-increasing interventions health," and "awareness-increasing interventions sexualization" were used. This author searched for all articles, books, eBooks, dissertations, government documents, and videos published between 2000 and 2023 on both engines. In addition, this author only included items that were accessible online. This resulted in an initial total of more than 200 potential sources.

The final selection process included two additional screenings. The first screening consisted of viewing titles, years, and abstracts for relevance to the topic, which 14 peer-reviewed articles and one dissertation passed. The second screening consisted of reading each of these 15 papers in full and evaluating them with a set of questions. Each paper had to answer yes

on each question in order to pass the second screening. These qualifications were devised to select health-related interventions that focused on increasing awareness to elicit behavior change. In order to determine what would work best to prevent or decrease sexualization, the interventions being studied should be attempting to solve a similar social health issue. A total of four papers passed the second screening. This is because many of the interventions only measured for increase in awareness but did not consider if the intervention elicited change in behavior. The set of questions are listed below:

1. Does the intervention seek to change a behavior?
2. Is the non-desirable behavior a health-related behavior?
3. Is the intervention of an educating or awareness-increasing nature?
4. Does the article explain its methods (i.e., how the intervention was implemented and how the author(s) measured its effectiveness)?
5. Does the article explain its results (i.e., if the intervention was successful in changing the non-desired behavior)?

Results

Following the selection process, five studies across four papers were selected for inclusion in the paper. These consisted of four individual intervention programs and one meta-analysis of several interventions. After reviewing the five studies, this author found three themes common across multiple interventions. Each intervention included the components of education and training, and three of the five interventions included the component of monitoring. The interventions' differences also provide useful information that could aid in developing future interventions.

The first common theme among the interventions is the component of education. Each intervention began with providing knowledge as to why a certain behavior or cognition is detrimental or unhealthy. For instance, the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) intervention aims to encourage people to assist those with mental disorders (Hadlaczky, 2014). The MHFA intervention begins with an explanation of what mental disorders are and how they negatively impact peoples' lives. One of the MHFA intervention's main goals when educating is to reduce the stigma of mental disorders (Hadlaczky, 2014). This changes any negatives attitudes or beliefs the target may have previously had about those with mental disorders, thus making the targets more inclined to helping those with mental disorders. As a second example, the goal of the Sonagachi Project was to decrease rates of HIV/AIDs contraction in sex workers. The sex workers were educated on what STDs were, the importance of STD treatment, empowerment, and even financial literacy. The Sonagachi Project was successful in encouraging the sex workers to confidently use protection. However, this success was not only due to education but teaching and training as well.

Although education is important, it seems as though in order to have lasting behavior change, targets must learn the abilities to do so. Each intervention helped the targets develop the necessary skills to change their behavior. For example, according to Zhang, Wang, and Neitzel (2023), school-based mental health interventions are more effective in reducing anxiety and depression when the program contained cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) components. Through CBT programs, students learned how to deal with their feeling through coping mechanisms. Another intervention, titled The Use of Robots in the Workplace (URW), had a goal of increasing productivity, engagement, and mental well-being in the workplace (Lopes, Ferreira, & Prada, 2023). The targets were taught self-efficiency, how to support others, action

planning, and coping strategies. The administrator, along with the help of videos and testimonials, walked the targets through a personalized project that taught them individually what they needed to change, why they needed to change it, and how they could change it.

The last common component is monitoring. Only three of the five interventions had this component because the other two interventions weren't long enough to track progress.

Monitoring allowed for the presenter to better assist the targets to change. The intervention became more personalized. The administrators from the URW intervention checked up on their targets every week to ensure they were following their plan. If the targets were struggling, the administrators could provide additional resources. Monitoring also allows the intervention to follow up on resources the targets may need. For example, the 100% Condom Use Program (100% CUP) monitored the number of sexual encounters compared to the number of condoms used at selected brothels. If this difference began to increase, the 100% CUP would send local authorities to these establishments to enforce the condom use policy. Furthermore, the 100% CUP would occasionally send a fake client to the establishments and purposefully try to purchase a service without the use of a condom. If such a purchase was successful, the 100% CUP would know to revisit these establishments and enforce their policies (Fernandez & Rovito, 2012). Monitoring tracks progress which allows room for correction if the intervention begins to be ineffective, allowing the administrator to make changes.

An analysis of these successful interventions suggests that an effective intervention, in general, should consist of education, training, and monitoring. However, there are other aspects to these interventions that made them successful, such as who administered the interventions, how long or frequent the intervention was, and who the targets were. Zhang, et al. (2023) found that interventions administered by a professional (opposed to a teacher), with a shorter duration

(compared to longer), and to secondary school students (compared to primary) had a greater effect size. Lopes, et al. (2023) found that interventions administered by robots, opposed to humans, produced more effective results. Moreover, the Sonagachi Project and the 100% CUP successfully used ex-sex workers to educate and consult sex workers about STDs, financial literacy, empowerment, etc. (Fernandez & Rovito, 2012). It is possible that this made the sex-worker participants feel understood and not judged. These findings, along with the three themes discussed previously, could also be used to improve the design of a new intervention to prevent sexualization.

Discussion

Proposed Intervention

After conducting a literature review on sexualization and reviewing effective interventions that specifically sought to change behavior, this author attempted to map out an intervention tailored to the prevention of sexualization. This section starts with an overview of the proposed sexualization prevention intervention that includes the purpose and goals of the intervention. Then, more specific components of the intervention are discussed and explained. Lastly, the author concludes with two hypotheses and possible variable changes to enhance the intervention's efficiency. Future researchers, with the right resources, could implement this intervention and test its effectiveness. This intervention could provide a start, and future researchers could troubleshoot the intervention as needed to make it more effective.

Overview of Proposed Intervention

Out of all the sexualizing sources (i.e., media peers, parents, and self), it seems that peers are the most influential when it comes to attitudes about sexualization (Trekels & Eggermont, 2021). Therefore, this intervention's target population would be high school students. Zhang et al. (2023) explained that schools are the ideal setting to implement preventative interventions due to large kid populations being in the same place at the same time. The purpose of the intervention is to prevent adolescents from sexualizing themselves and each other any further. To achieve this purpose, the specific goals of the intervention are to educate about the dangers of sexualization, train the students to combat it, and monitor the interventions long-term effectiveness.

Outline of Intervention

The students would have four 30-minute sessions over the course of four weeks. The administrator would be a hired peer, such as a college student. This college student would go

through a series of training sessions with a professional. They would be trained on how to present to kids, how to connect with kids, and screened for their personality to ensure they would provide a sense of comfort and security to kids. The peer administrator would educate and train the students on the following components: the definition of sexualization, examples of sexualization, negative consequences of sexualization, and how to challenge sexualizing messages. One component would be the main topic of each session and follow that order. The peer administrator would present to a group of 18-22 students. If the high school has a regularly occurring time for special events built into its weekly class schedule, this time could be used to deliver the proposed intervention. If the school does not have such a time scheduled, the intervention could take place during the physical education classes. Either way, students would not be kept longer than their normal school schedule.

Study Design to Test Efficacy of Intervention

To assure its effectiveness, a study could be run to test the efficacy of the proposed intervention. This study would be of a pretest/posttest/follow-up design. That is, the students would take a survey that would measure how much the students self-sexualize and sexualize others prior to the intervention. The survey would be completely anonymous and start with demographic questions such as gender, age, and race/ethnicity. The survey would then ask questions that measures self-sexualization and the act of sexualizing others. A sample of these questions may include “It is important to me to always look my best when I’m around my peers,” “I care about other people’s opinions concerning my physical appearance,” and “I often judge my peers based on how they look,” (Answers: Agree, slightly agree, neutral, slightly disagree, disagree). Naturally, this survey would have to be tested for validity and reliability before being used. However, there are self-sexualization scales and assessments that have already been tested

for validity and reliability that might be worth looking into when designing this intervention's survey. Afterward, the week following the last session of the intervention, the students will be asked to take the survey again. Finally, students will be assessed a third and final time two months later to measure lasting effects.

Hypotheses

This author has proposed two hypotheses about the results of the intervention. Ultimately, the author believes that the intervention would be successful in changing the way students view themselves and others, thus decreasing sexualization among the students. Specifically, self-report of sexualization scores will be significantly lower immediately following the intervention compared to the pre-test. Additionally, self-report of sexualization scores will be significantly lower on the two-month follow-up compared to the pre-test.

Additional Suggestions for Future Studies

After the effectiveness of the proposed intervention has been examined, components of the intervention could be altered to seek improved outcomes. There are many variables within the design of this intervention that could be changed for greater effectiveness. One variable change could be hiring professionals instead of peer mentors to administer the intervention. Furthermore, four sessions may not be enough to make a lasting impact, thus, more sessions could provide a larger impact. Another variable change could be making smaller group sizes, such as 4-6 students, compared to larger group sizes. In addition, the 30-minute sessions are designed to combat kids' short attention spans, but researchers may find better results with one-hour sessions. Moreover, the administrator could have a more interactive approach when delivering the intervention. Perhaps more involvement from the kids would have a greater effect than a didactic presentation style. Lastly, students who score high on the pre-test survey could be

assigned to a more intensive or longer intervention than low scorers. Future researchers could use the same pretest/posttest/follow-up design to assess the usefulness of these possible changes.

Conclusion

Sexualization is a phenomenon that is heavily incorporated in the media, interpersonal relationships, and sometimes, within individuals. Although sexualization can impact anyone, women and girls are more likely to be sexualized. Some researchers believe that sexualization is a necessity when becoming a sexual being, as sexualization can allow girls to learn sexual agency. However, other research has indicated that sexualization can do more harm than good. The sexualization of girls can cause poorer body image, mental health issues, and rape supportive attitudes in girls. Much of the research on sexualization seeks to understand the concept and how it impacts girls of various backgrounds. However, there is a lack of literature on how to prevent sexualization. This paper examined existing awareness-increasing interventions that were found to effectively change people's attitudes and behaviors. After reviewing four such interventions and one meta-analysis, this author found three common components of the interventions among them. Those components included education, training, and monitoring. This author used the components of awareness-increasing interventions that were proven effective in changing behaviors, and developed an intervention designed to prevent sexualization. This author wrote this paper in hopes that it will inspire researchers to focus and move towards preventing sexualization.

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