**Introduction**

The sexual objectification of women—basing women’s primary value on their sexual appeal to men, and defining appeal based on narrow standards of attractiveness (APA, 2007) — is a frequent occurrence in American culture. Theory and research suggest that the sexual objectification of women has increased in recent years. For example, Reichert and Carpenter (2004) found that the sexualization of women in advertisements increased significantly in the U.S. between 1983 and 2003. The sexualization in the culture is believed to be reaching girls (APA, 2007). For example, in a recent analysis it was found that 30% of clothing items available for pre-teen girls are considered sexualized (Goodin, Van Denburg, Murnen, & Smolak, 2011) such that the clothing characteristics of popular girls’ dolls. The coding systems for both Goodin et al. (2011) and Boyd et al. (2011) were found to be reliable and valid. For this study, the coding systems included: Non-functional shoes, short hemlines, slit in skirt/dress, animal prints, leather/pleather, slinky materials, fishnets, red/black, bare midriff, low cut tops, tops that emphasize breasts, sexualized writing, tight-fitting clothing, makeup, highlighted hair, blown-out hair, belly-button ring, and cleavage emphasizing jewelry.

**Method**

In this study, a content analysis was conducted to analyze the presence of sexualizing characteristics in portrayals of girls and women in the magazines Seventeen and Girls’ Life across time. Two issues per year of Seventeen were analyzed (April and October issues) from the following years: 1971, 1981, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011. Three issues of Girls’ Life per year were analyzed (August/September, February/March, June/July issues) from the following years: 1994, 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011. Each depiction of a girl and/or woman was coded individually for the presence of sexualizing characteristics in all images that were one-quarter page or larger. If girls and/or women were portrayed in a group, only the girls who were the most visible and not predominantly covered by another person were coded.

The coding scale was adapted from the Goodin et al. (2011) study, which looked at sexualized clothing for girls, and Boyd and Murnen (2011), which analyzed sexualizing characteristics of popular girls’ dolls. The coding systems for both Goodin et al. (2011) and Boyd et al. (2011) were found to be reliable and valid. For the present study, sexualizing characteristics included: Non-functional shoes, short hemlines, slit in skirt/dress, animal prints, leather/pleather, slinky materials, fishnets, red/black, bare midriff, low cut tops, tops that emphasize breasts, sexualized writing, tight-fitting clothing, makeup, highlighted hair, blown-out hair, belly-button ring, and cleavage emphasizing jewelry.

**Discussion**

Results from this study indicate that the sexualization of girls has increased from the 1970s in the magazine Seventeen and from the 1990s in the magazine Girls’ Life. Specifically, the depictions of low-cut tops, tops that emphasize breasts, tight-fitting clothing, and makeup have dramatically increased over time. With the increase, these messages may become normative in girls’ lives, making it more likely for them to accept the sexualized female role (APA, 2007; Murnen & Smolak, 2011; Smolak & Murnen, 2011). These messages may limit girls’ identification with other roles, encouraging them to uphold a sexualized ideal above everything else. This is concerning, especially since previous studies have indicated a number of negative effects due to sexualization, such as girls being perceived as less competent (Graft, Murnen, Smolak, submitted). The objectification of women has been linked with the development of self-objectification, the tendency to treat one’s body as on object. Self-objectification has been found to occur in girls as early as in the fifth grade (Lindberg, Grabe, & Hyde, 2007). Research indicates that women who surveil their bodies to a great degree are more likely to report body shame, which is linked to the development of eating disorders, depression, and sexual dysfunction (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 2011; Moradi & Yin-Ping, 2008). Thus, future research should further analyze sexualization practices in the culture, including the messages found in other media sources, and possible links to self-objectification in girls.

**References**


