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(Hetero)sexual Grooming:

A content analysis of female sexualization in American pre- and young-teen television

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Abstract

Much clothing, in a variety of adolescent clothing stores, is sexually explicit. At the same time, mainstream media has become extremely sexualized over the last several decades, and women and girls in particular are often depicted as sexual objects in advertisements, magazines, television, and film. Additionally, some research has identified a trend of sexualized clothing marketed to girls. Despite this, no research has addressed a similar trend in the clothing worn by female characters in pre- and young-teen (tween) television. In this thesis, I examine the extent to which clothing in contemporary tween television programming is sexualized. To do so, using a coding scheme adapted from Goodin et al. (2010), I analyzed 5 episodes each from the 2010 season of *Big Time Rush*, *iCarly*, *Suite Life on Deck*, and *Wizards of Waverly Place*. Over three-quarters of all female characters (76.5%) in these shows wore at least one sexualized outfit. Additionally, various factors such as age, race/ethnicity, and sexuality played a role in framing the ways in which girls and women were sexualized.

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(Hetero)sexual Grooming:

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Introduction

Many clothing stores carry sexualized products marketed specifically to girls. Delia's, a store targeting customers 14 years-and-under, has sold thong underwear embellished with the words "feeling lucky?" and cropped shirts reading "porn star" (e.g. Merskin, 2004). Big name stores such as Abercrombie & Fitch have received criticism for aiding the sexualization of children and went under fire for also selling thong underwear with provocative sayings to children between the ages of seven and fourteen (Merskin, 2004). Indeed, a body of research has concluded that a significant portion of clothing sold in a wide range of adolescent stores exhibit sexual characteristics (Goodin et al., 2011).

At the same time, many scholars believe mainstream media shapes "how we think about ourselves as gendered beings, as well as about the world that surrounds us" (Dines, 2010, p.81), so this sexualization of clothes may be related to the level of heterosexual sex appeal presented in media depictions of female figures. A report by the University of Southern California's Institute for Communication Technology Management projected that by 2015 Americans will consume multiple forms of media for 15.5 hours per person per day (Short, 2013). It has also been estimated that youth will encounter approximately 10,000-15,000 sexual references, jokes, and innuendos in the media per year (e.g. Ward, 2003) and, since the advent of the internet, finding sexual content has become as easy as the click of a button. Since the media is believed to be the most critical educator about sexual relationships for today's youth (Ward, 2003), and we are "cultural beings who

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develop our identities out of the dominant images that surround us” (Dines, 2010, p.102), girls learn to prioritize their own sexualization, as these messages promise popularity, attractiveness, maturity, and power (APA Taskforce, 2007).

Despite the wealth of data demonstrating the trend of increased sexualization of images of women and girls in mass media, and the increasingly sexualized clothing sold to girls, no research has explored a similar trend pre- and young-teen television. In this thesis, I examine the extent to which articles of clothing, outfits, and characters are sexualized in pre- and young-teen television. As the type of sexualization is important to this discussion, I also analyze the role heteronormativity plays in the construction of pre- and young-teen sexual identities. Using coding schemes developed by Goodin et al. (2011) and Kayzak and Martin (2009), I examine four popular television shows aimed at a young adolescent audience.

Literature Review

Sexualization of Girls and Women in the Media

In the United States, girls are exposed to both implicit and explicit messages from parents, role models, peers, and the media that promote an image of women limited to her sexual attractiveness (APA Taskforce, 2007). The permeating messages to girls and women in mainstream media “is they should always be sexually available [to men], always have sex on their minds, be willing to be dominated and even sexually aggressed against, and they will be gazed on as sexual objects” (Merskin, 2004), or else run the risk of complete media erasure (Dines, 2010). However, girls and women aren't only expected to be heterosexually desirable, but also innocent and youthful. This focus on sexual

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desirability in conjunction with purity creates a “double bind” for girls and women; for them to be desirable in any way, they must actively embody both the ‘virgin’ and ‘whore’ dichotomies, and at increasingly younger ages (Media Education Foundation, 2010).

Kilbourne (1991) named the infiltration of adult women sexualization into young teen and child media the “filtering down effect” (p.3). This effect of marketing sex to younger and younger audiences has been discussed in much literature (Durham, 2008; Egan & Hawkes, 2008; Gunter, 2014; Media Education Foundation, 2010; Lerum & Dworkin, 2009; Merskin, 2004). A majority of erotic images of adolescent girls dominate American popular culture (Walkerdine, 1998) and, as Mohr (1996) described, American society is saturated with “pedophilic images” that are “surprisingly common” (p.96). For Meenakshi Gigi Durnham, what she terms the “Lolita effect”, forwards the idea that “childishness is sexy” and that little girls in particular are sexy (Durham, 2008, p.24). Junod (2001), additionally, calls this sexualization of girls the “pornographication of the American girl” (Junod, 2001, p.133), and contends that it saturates mainstream media.

Moreover, scholars have noticed that the opposite effect is happening to women: women are being turned into girls to be sexualized. The line between girls and women is thinner than ever: as girls are getting older younger, and women are doing their best to stay young (Durham, 2008). Durham (2008) discusses the decreasing age at which girls are marketed as sex symbols as well the ways in which “eternal youth” is stressed in popular culture. Fashion advertising imagery—and media in general—is replete with photographs in which women are “dressed down” like little girls and conversely, young girls are “dressed up” as grown women, offering a veritable visual feast based on pedophilic fantasy (Cortese, 1999). In media images today, that dividing line between

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sexually innocent girlhood and sexually aware womanhood is being blurred (Gunter, 2014).

Indeed, recent fashion merchandising mirrors media representations of the desirability of sexualized girls. Goodin et al. (2010) analyzed the supply for sexualized clothing in children's stores. Upon analyzing 15 popular brand name stores in the United States, Goodin et al. discovered a sexual undertone present in a substantial portion of girls' clothing and a large percentage (86.4%) of these sexualized clothes also displayed child-like characteristics. The authors posit this mixing of sexualized and childlike were so prevalent in stores because parents were more likely to buy a sexualized article of clothing when it was unassuming and seemingly innocent.

As it has been consistently demonstrated that girls and women are sexualized in advertising, I predicted that I would find similar trends of sexualization in pre- and young-teen television.

Sexualization of Boys and Men in the Media

Sexualized images of masculinity in mainstream media present big, dominating bodies, which clothing tends to accentuate. For example, a study of fashion advertisements showed that boys were likely to be dressed in "suit jackets designed to emphasise [*sic*] the shoulders of adult men", thus making the boys look bigger, more in charge, more masculine (Gunter, 2014, p.52). Sexualized men in more recent advertisements appear to be in the position of the commonly eroticized female of previous years (MacKinnon, 2003). In the past several decades, muscular, hairless men have been depicted in advertisements with less and less clothing (Media Education Foundation, 2010). All the same, this sexualized imagery of men is more homosocial in

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nature and less monolithic, meaning the focus tends to be on men socializing with one another and engaging in activities, rather than solely on their bodies (Nixon, 1996).

Hyper-masculinity is pervasive in Hollywood films (MacKinnon, 2002). However, these images of hyper-masculinity and sexualization are not prevalent in primetime television the same way, if at all. Indeed, a lot of times when adult masculinity is represented in primetime television, it does not align with the hypersexualized standards. In shows such as *The Simpsons* and *Malcom in the Middle*, men are depicted as dumb, one of the kids, and irresponsible—what Butsch (1995) calls the “white male working-class buffoon”. To be sure, this complete de-sexualization of the working class man is far from hegemonic¹.

Because of this variation in the sexual images of boys and men found in the media, I anticipate that I would not find the same degree of sexualization in male characters as I would female characters.

Representations of Race and Ethnicity in the Media

Research has documented that people of color are consistently underrepresented in mainstream media. When Khanna and Harris (2015) asked students to assess the representations of race in primetime television, students “frequently described casts as ‘all white’, reflecting ‘little diversity’, and many students recognized that characters of color were often injected into all-white casts as ‘token-characters’ with marginal representation” (p.43).

Hunt (2003) found that the world of prime time television is a predominately black and white one. In 2002, Hunt found that prime time television characters were:

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White (74.3%), Black (15.9%), Latino (3.2%), Asian (2.7%), and Native American (0%). Staying true to the numbers, seven years later Monk-Turner et al. (2010) found that only 5% of all television actors observed were Latino and 16% of all television prime time actors were African American. Moreover, both Latinos (18%) and African Americans (9%) were more likely to be viewed as immoral compared their white (2%) counterparts and more Latino (18%) and black (9%) characters were viewed as despicable rather than admired, compared to white characters (3%).

Similarly, Sanchez-Hucles et al. (Ed. Dines & Humez, 1995) found that women of color were more likely than their white-counterparts to be sexualized in advertisements, with women of color making up 35% of the sexually provocative advertisements surveyed. Of these, there were 10 examples (43.5%) of women being portrayed as “ethnically exotic” (p.193), which was defined “as focusing on the ethnic features of the face, ethnic clothing, or ethnic stereotypes” (p.193). Two of these women were Latina, six were Black, and two were Asian. Native American women were absent from all advertisements. Unmistakably, these characters are being sexualized, type-casted, and underrepresented solely because of their race and/or ethnicity.

Black women are stereotypically and repeatedly represented in mainstream media as either the oversexed fantasy object, the dominating matriarch, or the nonthreatening, desexualized mammy figure (Edwards, 1993). Author bell hooks (1992) suggests that “representations of black female bodies in contemporary popular culture rarely subvert or critique images of black female sexuality which were part of the cultural apparatus of 19th-century racism and which still shape perceptions today” (p.5).

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Moreover, the history of black women on televisions reflects what MacDonald (1983) terms the “media’s unfulfilled promise”; instead of using its potential to “reverse ridicule and misinformation”, it has “perpetuated the worst stereotypes of blacks found in American popular culture” (p.47). Black women in the media have been and are depicted as unsexual “Mammy” figures (MacDonald, 1983); “impoverished victims” (Rhodes, 1991, p.428); “welfare queens” (Rose, 1991, p.532); and as “whores and prostitutes” (Rose, 1991, p.532).

Black men are just as stereotypically represented. Throughout the media, black men, teenagers, and boys too often have been depicted as buffoons, criminals, or oversexed animal-like creatures who lust after white women (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000).

In the media, Latina characters are also often stereotypically represented. Stereotypical Latinas on television “all make good domestics”, mispronounce words, speak Spanish, are Catholic, are impulsive dancers, are pampered, and are known for “cooking up a spicy storm”, inside and outside of the kitchen (Cofer, 2005, p.247; Gill, 1996; Merskin, 2007). And, most prominently, Latinas are stereotypically represented as “addictively romantic, sensual, sexual, and even exotically dangerous” (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005, p.125). According to Keller (1994), sex, passion, manipulation, and physical beauty are all cornerstones to the stereotypical Latina we see on TV.

Moreover, Mastro & Behm-Morawitz (2005) found that, while some of their results indicate that Latino and Latina stereotypes are fading from the television landscape, their data “simultaneously demonstrates that in other instances stereotypical portrayals Latinos persist” (p.125). Their results suggest that Latinos and Latinas were the youngest, most inappropriately dressed characters, the least intelligent, most verbally

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aggressive, embodied the lowest work ethic, and were the most ridiculed of all races/ethnicities represented on primetime television. Similarly, Latinos are typically restricted to a small number of parts including comic, criminals, law enforcers, and sex objects (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005).

Quite contrary to the depiction of the stereotypical lazy, sexualized Latino and Latina characters are the depictions of white children. Seiter (1990) discusses how white-children in adverts are more often than not depicted as the “go-getter” (p.100). For example, in commercials set in the classroom, white children are depicted as innovative and in-charge, a stereotype not present for children of color. Instead, children of color in these adverts are typically represented as passive onlookers to white children’s blossoming future.

Moreover, Walkerdine (1998) discusses how white girls in the media are more often shielded from premature sexualization. Girls of color are more likely than white girls to be depicted in images “similar to child pornography”, thus experiencing an “intrusion of adult sexuality” into their representations of themselves (Walkerdine, 1998, p.165). White children, on the contrary, are less likely to be depicted in the same sexualized setting, and are instead more likely to be represented in educational and un-eroticized settings, and as an “innocent child of the bourgeoisie”, safely protected from sexualized working-class world (p.165-166).

As people of color are more sexualized in media depictions—and Latinas in particular—I anticipated people of color to wear more sexualized clothing items than their white counterparts.

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Heteronormativity in the Media

A number of studies examining the role sexualization plays in teen advertisements have found that much of the content in mainstream youth media emphasizes the “centrality of heterosexual relationships” and the need for “women to become sexual objects to attract men” (Ward 2003; Carpenter 1998; Durham 1996, 1998; Garner et al., 1998; McMahon 1990; Smith & Matre 1975). Heteronormativity is the “multiple, often mundane ways through which heterosexuality overwhelmingly structures and ‘pervasively and insidiously’ orders ‘everyday existences’” (Kitzinger 2005, p.479).

Heteronormativity is more complex than simply encouraging people with opposite genitalia to find one another attractive; heteronormativity also “defines normative ways of life in general” (Martin & Kazzyak, 2009, p.332). Heteronormativity encourages people to stay within the confines of traditional family and work systems and dictates specific patterns of consumerism and consumption (Ingraham 1999). Within heterosexuality, heteronormativity defines a further hierarchy of social acceptableness, which, according to Rubin (1984), includes being married, monogamous, procreative, and in an intra-class and intra-racial relationship is valued above all else.

Heteronormativity is pervasive in the media. Kayzak and Martin (2009) describe how, even in G-rated films—a form of media supposedly devoid of sexual content—heterosexuality is constructed both within a relationship (“hetero-romantic love”) and outside such a relationship (“the heterosexual gaze”). Their analysis concluded that hetero-romantic love relationships in films are constructed as exceptional, powerful, magical, and transformative. Additionally, heterosexuality outside of relationships is constructed through portrayals of men gazing desirously at women’s bodies. They found

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that the former is most developed in these films. In the overwhelming majority, hetero-romance was either a major or secondary plotline that emphasized the “transformative power” of this love. As Kayzak & Martin (2009) wrote: “Romantic heterosexual relationships are portrayed as a special, distinct, exceptional form of relationship, different from all others”, thus positively reinforcing heterosexual relationships (p.324).

Similarly, Johnson (2005) suggests that the media equates biology and naturalness with heterosexual love through framing heterosexual relationships in the context of organic connection and uncontrollable chemistry. And Kenney (Ed. Dines & Humez, 1995) found that representations of sexuality in the Disney channel show *The Suite Life on Deck*² depicts heterosexuality as the only representation of appropriate sexual identity (Kenney, Ed. Dines & Humez, 1995). She writes that, “heterosexuality is posited for effortless digestion and an unassuming given... whereas it is likely that inclusion of an otherwise comparable same-sex relationship would be deemed inappropriate” (p.180).

Further, heterosexuality is normalized through the lack of queer and other non-hetero narratives in mainstream media. The Gay & Lesbian Alliance against Defamation’s (GLAAD) Annual Diversity Study of primetime television, reported that LGBT characters accounted for only 3% of all scripted series regular characters in the 2009-2010 broadcast television schedule (Paxton et al., 2010). Similarly, Paxton et al. found that of the 600 series regular characters counted on the five broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, The CW, Fox and NBC), 18 are LGBT. A more recent study by Kane et al. (2015) found that these percentages have changed little in recent years.

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As heterosexuality is a cornerstone to modern media depictions of love and relationships and as queer sexualities are typically absent, I predicted that heterosexuality would be the only sexuality depicted in the shows analyzed.

Hypotheses

The major purpose of this study was to examine the prevalence of sexualized clothing in pre- and young-teen media. There are several factors which influence this sexualization in the media. As the literature above shows, gender affects rates of sexualization, namely, girls and women are considerably more sexualized than boys and men; sexualization differs based on race; and heterosexuality dominates representation of sexuality. Therefore, drawn from this literature, four specific hypotheses were tested: 1) Sexualized clothing is expected to be worn by girls and women; 2) More sexualized clothing is expected to be worn by girls and women than by boys and men; 3) Characters of color are expected to wear more sexualized outfits than white characters; and 4) Heterosexuality is expected to be the only sexuality portrayed or discussed.

Coding Strategy

This study builds upon the coding strategy created by Goodin et al. (2010) who examined the degree of sexualized children's clothes available in a variety of stores. Because I wanted to examine whether television programming for pre- and young-teens might be a possible source of the demand for sexualized children's clothes found by Goodin et al. (2010), I looked at the four most popular children's shows of 2010. These shows were selected because they were nominated for the 2011 Nickelodeon Kid's Choice awards category for "Best Television Show" and, thus, among the most watched

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television shows in tween TV. Four shows were thus selected: *Big Time Rush*, *iCarly*, *The Suite Life on Deck*, and *Wizards of Waverly Place*.

I used the following coding schemes, established by Goodin et al. (2010): an article of clothing was sexualizing if it "(a) revealed a sexualized body part, (b) emphasized a sexualized body part, (c) had characteristics associated with sexiness, and/or (d) had writing on it with sexualizing content" (5). According to Goodin et al., a sexualized body part "included the chest, waist, buttocks, and legs" (5).

I created seven categories of clothing items: over article (jacket, vest, etc.); shirt; dress; under article (tank top, second shirt, etc.); bottoms; bottoms 2 (tights, leggings, etc.); and shoes. An item were coded as "revealing a sexualized body part" if it exposed a sexualized body part such as the breasts. An item was coded as "emphasizing a sexualized body part" if the cut or tightness of the item emphasized the waist, chest, and/or legs. For example, tight jeans emphasizing the butt or groin for both men and women were coded as "emphasizing a sexualized body part". Shirts that were tight on men, thus emphasizing biceps, chest, or abs, were coded as "emphasizing", and "revealing" if they exposed any of these areas. If an outfit had one or more article of sexualized clothing, it was considered a sexualized outfit. If a character wore at least one sexualized outfit they were considered a sexualized character.

Following Goodin et al., clothing items that were made of certain fabrics or certain patterns, such as leopard print, leather, lace, and/or silk were coded as "having characteristics associated with sexiness". Furthermore, if an article of clothing had rhinestones or sequins which drew attention to a sexualized body part, it was coded as "emphasizing a sexualized body part". Pumps were coded as "emphasizing a sexualized

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body part” as they’re intended to draw attention to the legs and butt, and were also coded as “having characteristics associated with sexiness” if they were constructed from a fabric associated with sexiness and/or were platform heels³. Finally, clothing was coded as having writing on it with sexualized content if it had one or more of the following: it had writing on it which either alluded to or blatantly referenced a sexualized body part(s); if the writing described or referenced actions regarding the act of sex; if it displayed words associated with sex/sexiness in any way (e.g. a shirt reading “perfect catch”).

I built upon Goodin et al.’s analysis by adding a fifth category, (e) childlike in print, color, cut, and/or pattern. I coded a clothing item as childlike if it had a toy marketed to kids on it; had frills and/or bows; had diminutive writing on it (i.e. “lil’ cutie”); and/or cartoon depictions of animals/objects. Thus, the first unit of analysis is articles of clothing.

Once it was determined if a clothing article was sexualized and/or childlike, it was put in one of four categories. Three of these categories were taken from Goodin et al.: "clothing items that had at least one childlike characteristic and no sexualizing characteristics were coded as "childlike" (CH); items that had only sexualizing characteristics were coded as "definitely sexualizing" (DS); while those that had both sexualizing and childlike characteristics were coded as “ambiguously sexualizing" (AS)" (5). Goodin et al. classifies the last category as "adult like" (AD), meaning "clothing items [which] had no childlike characteristics but were also not sexualizing". Disliking the connotation this implies, namely that adults cannot wear clothes that are either childish or sexualizing, I changed this category name to "neutral" (N). If an outfit

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consisted of any sexualized (AS or DS) articles of clothing, it was considered sexualized. If a character wore a sexualized outfit, the character was considered sexualized. Thus, the second unit of analysis was outfit and the three, character.

To code for the gender of a character, I created three categories based on perceived gender: boy/man, girl/woman, and other⁴. I determined the gender presentation based on several different factors: cosmetic markers (hair, make-up, etc.); actions/movement; gendered words used on that person (dude, chick, etc.)⁵.

To code for the race or ethnicity of the character, I made assumptions based on their perceived racial/ethnic appearance⁶. Using a comparable process to Khanna (2010), race/ethnicity was inferred via the use of auditory indicators such as last name and accents, and visual cues such as hair and/or skin color.

Determining heterosexual themes in the shows was done in two parts: one part was analyzing the prevalence of hetero-romantic relationships and the second, general references to heterosexuality and someone's "heterosexiness". Using a coding scheme developed by Martin & Kazyak (2009), an episode was coded as either having a main-plot line or minor-plot line centered on hetero-romantic relationships, or as having at least one reference in an episode to such a relationship. An episode was coded as having "sexiness" in it if characters wore sexualized clothing, performed any sexualized or "sexy" actions, or made sexualized references. If characters blatantly made a scene about viewing sexualized parts on a woman's body, the episode was also coded as depicting scenes of "ogling at a woman's body".

I determined a character's age by either contextual cues and/or blatant statements. Some of the contextual cues included school attendance (pre-school, high school, etc.),

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whether someone reflected on their younger years, or if someone was a parent or grandparent. Blatant statements included people saying things like: "but I'm only fifteen!" or "this is my last year of high school". All of the younger character's ages were determined by their level of education. In this study I consider a girl to be someone in their senior year of high school or younger, and a woman to be older than high school.

Characters were coded as main by the number of episodes in which they appeared. Since I coded five episodes per television series, if a character appeared in all five episodes they were considered a "main character"; if they appeared in four out of the five episodes, they were coded as a secondary character; if they appeared in 2-3 episodes, they were coded as a reoccurring minor character; and if they only appeared in only one episode they were considered a minor character.

Results

Twenty episodes of programming targeting tweens, five episodes each from *Big Time Rush*, *iCarly*, *Suite Life on Deck*, and *Wizards of Waverly Place*, were examined. A total of 616 outfits worn by 118 characters were analyzed. Of these 616 outfits, 37.7% (n=232) were sexualized, i.e. they consisted of one or more sexualized clothing item(s). 58 characters wore at least one sexualized outfit, thus half of the characters on shows for pre- and young-teen viewers were sexualized (49.2%).

Hypothesis 1: Sexualized clothing is expected to be worn by female characters

As hypothesized, female characters overwhelmingly wore clothing that was sexualized. Of the 51 female characters analyzed, 74.5% (n=38) wore one or multiple sexualized outfit(s)⁷. Surprisingly, there was little difference in the percent of sexualized

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outfits worn by girls (n=31) compared to women (n=20). 74.2% of girls wore sexualized outfits as compared to 75% of the women. Moreover, female characters who wore sexualized outfits did so repeatedly. Fully 80% of the outfits worn by these characters were sexualized, although grown women wore sexualized outfits a little more frequently than girls (84.6% vs 77%).

Table 1. Percent of female characters with sexualized outfits

Age	N	Sexualized	Non
Girls	31	74.2%	25.8%
Women	20	75.0%	25.0%

In addition, many of the individual clothing items worn by female characters were sexualized. Indeed, 41.3% items of clothing worn by girls or women were sexualized, contributing to the total of 169 sexualized outfits worn by female characters. Of the sexualized outfits, 50.9% (n=86) had only one sexualized clothing item, 40.8% (n=69) had two sexualized clothing items, and 8.3% (n=24) had three sexualized clothing items. Women were more likely than girls to wear two or more sexualized clothing items in one outfit (58.9% vs 44.2%). While girls were more frequently sexualized, women were sexualized to a higher degree.

Table 2. Percent of sexualized female outfits by number of sexualized items

Age	N	1	>1
Girls	113	55.8%	44.2%
Women	56	41.1%	58.9%

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Finally, of outfits categorized as sexualized, a vast majority (79.3%) only contained articles of clothing coded as “definitely sexualized” while the others (21.6%) contained clothing items coded as “ambiguously sexualized”⁸. Girls were more likely than women to wear an outfit with a mix of child-like and sexualized characteristics (coded as “ambiguously sexualized”). Of the sexualized outfits worn by girls, 23% (n=26) were “ambiguously sexualized” and 77% (n=87) were “definitely sexualized”. Of the sexualized outfits worn by women, 19.6% (n=11) were “ambiguously sexualized” and 80.4% (n=45) were “definitely sexualized”. So, while girls were predominantly “definitely sexualized”, they were still more likely than women to be “ambiguously sexualized”.

Table 3. Percent of sexualized female outfits by type of sexualized outfit

Age	N	AS	DS
Girls	113	23.0%	77.0%
Women	56	19.6%	80.4%

*AS=Ambiguously sexualized, DS=Definitely sexualized

Hypothesis 2: More female than male characters are expected to wear sexualized outfits

As expected, of the 68 male characters in the television shows analyzed, only 29.4% (n=20) appeared in a sexualized outfit. Surprisingly, boys wore considerably more sexualized outfits than men. 51.8% (n=14) of boys were portrayed wearing sexualized outfits as compared to 14.6% (n=6) of men. However, male characters who were sexualized in this way were so sporadically. Less than half (45%) of the outfits worn by individuals in this group were sexualized more than once, and boys were portrayed in this

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way more often than men (50% vs 33.3%). Therefore, boys wore sexualized outfits only half the time and were repeatedly sexualized another half the time; men were barely sexualized. Although when boys and men were sexualized it was clear: all of these clothing items (n=1286) were coded as “definitely sexualized”. When boys and men were sexualized they were obviously so.

Table 4. Percent of male characters with sexualized outfits

Age	N	Sexualized	Non
Boys	27	51.8%	48.1%
Men	41	14.6%	85.4%

Thus these findings demonstrated that female characters wore more sexualized outfits than male characters (74.5% vs 29.4%), and they wore them more frequently (80% vs 26.6%), suggesting that female characters were more sexualized than their male counterparts. Unsurprisingly, girls were more likely to be ambiguously sexualized than male characters (21.6% vs 0%).

Hypothesis 3: Characters of color are expected to be more sexualized than white characters

Of the 117 characters in the television shows analyzed, 89 were white, 12 were black, and 12 were Latina/o. The other four characters were coded as either Asian-Pacific Islander (API) or “other”. Because of the small number they were not included. Not surprisingly, Latina/o characters were considerably more sexualized than black and white characters; 75% of Latina/o characters were sexualized, whereas 48.3% of white characters and 25% of black characters wore sexualized outfits.

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Latinas were the most sexualized of the three female groups. 6 Latinas appearing in the episodes analyzed all wore sexualized outfits. Latina girls were just as sexualized as Latina women. Of these 6 Latina characters, 3 were girls and 3 were women, all of whom were portrayed wearing sexualized clothing. Further, Latinas who wore sexualized clothing wore them repeatedly. Fully 93.8% of the outfits worn by individuals in this group were sexualized, and this was the same for girls and women.

Table 5. Percent of Latina characters with sexualized outfits

Age	N	Sexualized	Non
Girls	3	100.0%	0.0%
Women	3	100.0%	0.0%

Importantly, multiple pieces of clothes within an outfit were sexualized for this group: 43.8% of clothing items were sexual, which created 30 sexualized outfits. Of these outfits only 10% (n=3) were “ambiguously sexualized”, and women wore these outfits more than girls (14.3% vs 6.25%). This means that when Latinas were sexualized, they were definitely so, but when they wore “ambiguously sexualized” outfits, Latina women wore more than Latina girls.

Table 6. Percent of sexualized Latina outfits by type of sexualized outfit

Age	N	AS	DS
Girls	16	6.3%	93.8%
Women	14	14.3%	85.7%

Finally, 36.6% of sexualized outfits worn by Latina characters had two or more sexualized articles of clothing. Of these, Latina women wore more than one sexualized

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clothing items per outfit to a higher degree than Latina girls (57.1% vs 18.8%). So, while Latina girls and women were predominately categorized as “definitely sexualized”, the degree to which was not high. However, Latina women were sexualized to a higher degree than Latina girls.

Table 7. Percent of Latina's sexualized outfits by number of sexualized items

Age	N	1	>1
Girls	16	81.3%	18.8%
Women	14	42.9%	57.1%

Of the 12 black characters, 4 were female and of these 3 wore one or more sexualized outfit(s). Black girls wore more sexualized outfits than black women. Two of the black characters were girls and 2 were women, and black girls appearing in these shows were portrayed wearing sexualized clothing as compared to 50% of black women.

Table 8. Percent of black female characters with sexualized outfits

Age	N	Sexualized	Non
Girls	2	100.0%	0.0%
Women	2	50.0%	50.0%

But both black girls and women who wore sexualized outfits wore them repeatedly: 85% of the outfits worn by individuals in this group were sexualized. And girls were portrayed in this way more often than women (100% vs 83%). Therefore, black female characters were almost constantly represented in sexualized clothing.

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Moreover, 85% (n=51) of the individual items of clothes worn by black girls and women were sexualized. These items constructed 17 sexualized outfits, of which Black women wore considerably more (88.3% vs 11.8%). The degree to which the outfits were sexualized was also considerably greater for Black women. 73.3% of sexualized outfits worn by Black women had two or more of these sexualized articles of clothing compared to none of the black girls.

White female characters were less likely to be sexualized than the girls or women in the other racial and ethnic groups under investigation. Of the 89 white characters, 39 were girls and women and 69.2% of that total wore sexualized outfits. White girls were slightly less likely than white women to be sexualized (68.2% vs 70.6%), and when white female characters wore sexualized outfits did so frequently: 72.7% of their outfits were sexualized. White women wore sexualized outfits more frequently than white girls (81.8% vs 71.9%).

Table 9. Percent of white female characters with sexualized outfits

Age	N	Sexualized	Non
Girls	22	68.2%	31.8%
Women	17	70.6%	29.4%

A small portion of clothing items worn by white female characters were sexualized: only 36.5% of all clothing items. These sexualized clothing items were represented in 101 sexualized outfits worn by white girls and women. Of the 101 outfits, 82 were worn by white girls and 27 by white women. Of the outfits worn by white girls, 24.4% (n=20) were "ambiguously sexualized" and 75.6% (n=62) were coded as

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"definitely sexualized". The majority of white women's outfits were also coded as "definitely sexualized": 11.1% (n=3) outfits were categorized as "ambiguously sexualized" and 88.9% (n=24) as "definitely sexualized". Although there was a presence of clothing coded as sexualized and childlike, the majority of outfits worn by white girls or women were definitely sexualized.

Table 10. Percent of sexualized white female outfits by type of sexualized outfit

Age	N	AS	DS
Girls	82	24.4%	75.6%
Women	27	11.1%	88.9%

Additionally, 49.5% of sexualized outfits worn by white girls and women had two or more sexualized articles of clothing in them. White women were more likely than white girls to wear two or more sexualized clothing items per outfit (55.6% vs 47.6%). This means that almost half of the outfits worn by white female character were sexualized to a high degree, and that white women were sexualized to a higher degree than white girls.

Table 11. Percent of sexualized white female outfits by number of sexualized items

Age	N	1	>1
Girls	82	52.4%	47.6%
Women	27	44.4%	55.6%

Men across race wore few sexualized outfits. Of the three racial categories, Latinos wore the highest percentage of sexualized outfits at 26.6%. Of the Latinos who

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were sexualized, only 33% of their outfits were sexualized, meaning that characters who wore sexualized outfits did so sporadically. Similarly, white boys and men were only 15.6% sexualized, and only 23.3% of outfits to be worn by these boys and men were sexualized. Black male characters did not wear any sexualized outfit.

Of the three racial/ethnic groups then, Latina were the most sexualized group of characters (100%) and were most frequently portrayed in sexualized outfits (93.8%). Latinas' outfits were also most likely to be unambiguously sexualized (86.7%). Black girls and women were the second most sexualized group (75%) and second most frequently sexualized (85%). Black girls and women, however, wore the highest percentage of sexualized clothing items (65%) and therefore wore the most outfits with two or more sexualized clothing items (64.7%). White girls and women were the least sexualized in every category.

Hypothesis 4: Heterosexuality is expected to be the only sexuality portrayed or discussed

References to hetero-romantic love was present in 85% (n=17) of the episodes analyzed. Of the 20 episodes, 40% (n=8) had main plot-lines dealing with hetero-romantic love and 40% (n=8) had a minor plot-line dealing with this type of love theme. All the references or major/minor plot-lines dealt with achieving or maintaining heterosexual relationships or dates. As sexualized clothing was one of the ways "sexiness" was represented in shows (Martin & Kazyak, 2009), all episodes were considered to have representations of sexiness. In 35% (n=7) of episodes some form of ogling at women's bodies occurred. No references to non-heterosexual relationships or desires were made.

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Table 12. Heterosexual and hetero-romantic content in surveyed television episodes

Television Show	Episode Name	Produced by	Hetero-Romantic Story Line			Heterosexuality	
			Any References	Major Plot	Minor Plot	Sexiness	Ogling of women's bodies
Wizards of Waverly Place	"Alex Tells the World"	Disney	x		x	x	
Wizards of Waverly Place	"All About You-Niverse"	Disney				x	
Big Time Rush	"Big Time Break"	Nickelodeon	x		x	x	x
Big Time Rush	"Big Time Concert"	Nickelodeon	x		x	x	
Big Time Rush	"Big Time Crib"	Nickelodeon				x	
Big Time Rush	"Big Time Girlfriends"	Nickelodeon	x	x	x	x	
Big Time Rush	"Big Time Halloween"	Nickelodeon	x		x	x	
iCarly	"iPsycho"	Nickelodeon	x			x	
iCarly	"iSam's Mom"	Nickelodeon	x			x	x
iCarly	"iStart a Fan War"	Nickelodeon	x	x		x	
iCarly	"iWas a Pagaent Girl"	Nickelodeon	x			x	x
iCarly	"iWon't Cancel the Show"	Nickelodeon	x	x		x	
Suite Life on Deck	"Love and War"	Disney	x	x	x	x	x
Suite Life on Deck	"Mother of the Groom"	Disney	x	x		x	x
Suite Life on Deck	"My Sister's Keeper"	Disney	x	x		x	x
Suite Life on Deck	"Once Upon a Suite Life"	Disney	x		x	x	x
Wizards of Waverly Place	"Positive Alex"	Disney	x	x		x	
Suite Life on Deck	"The Silent Treatment"	Disney	x	x	x	x	
Wizards of Waverly Place	"Third Wheel"	Disney	x			x	
Wizards of Waverly Place	"Western Show"	Disney				x	

Discussion

The Representation of Girls and Women

In this study I found evidence for a substantial presence of sexualization in girl's and women's clothing in pre- and young-teen television programs. A considerable percentage of all girls' and women's outfits were sexualized (74.5%). And girls wore the same amount of sexualized clothing as the adult women in these television programs (74.2% v. 75%), a finding which corresponds with the literature discussing the ways in which girls and women are similarly sexualized (Cortese, 1999; Durham, 2008).

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Moreover, girls and women were not always just sexualized, but were at times simultaneously childlike. My findings, that 3% of outfits contained clothing items coded as “ambiguously sexualized”, aligned with the Cortese’s (1999) and Durham’s (2008) argument that the blurring of lines between adulthood (sexualization) and childhood (innocence) is recreated in mainstream media. And the fact that a close percentage of women (19.6%) were similarly categorized as “ambiguously sexualized” which further reinforces Durham’s (2008) point about how “eternal youth” is stressed in popular culture and Cortese’s (1999) claim that women are “dressed down” like little girls.

What’s more, the fact that any girls were coded as sexualized, let alone a large portion of them, reinforces the arguments about the sexualization of girlhood made by Durham (2008), Egan & Hawkes (2008), Junod (2001), Media Education Foundation (2010), Merskin (2004), and Walkerdine (1998).

As my data show, many of the girls were presented much older than their age. Although I only collected data on clothing, while watching the shows other patterns emerged. Equally as successful as clothing in creating the overly mature image, girls were additionally portrayed in sophisticated hair, makeup, jewelry, and other accessories.

With the exception of one⁹, every high school girl wore professional and chic hair styles. Across the board, girls’ hair styles were primed in a way reminiscent of fashion magazines: hair worn down with big, loose curls undoubtedly crafted by a curling iron. Not one character was shown with messy or non-manipulated hair; every hair style was obviously crafted and perfected.

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I noticed a similar trend with girls' makeup. Although these girls were no more than 18, their make-up was at times reminiscent of styles worn out to the club. Certain characters (Camille Roberts, London Tipton, Alex Russo, Sam Puckett) appeared with heavy mascara, dark eyeshadows, and bright lip-stick colors. Even when girls were not as noticeably made-up, they all wore a minimal amount of makeup. Despite the fact these shows centered on the lives of high-schoolers, not one girl had visible acne. All had very smooth skin, at least a base coat of mascara, and more often than not, were wearing a neutral lip gloss shade.

Girls' jewelry was additionally too mature for their age. Yet again many of the girls' jewelry choices were reminiscent of adult women's fashion trends. Moreover, jewelry like dangly earrings and chunky necklaces drew the viewer's attention to sexualized areas of the body (made-up faces and breasts, respectively).

It struck me as interesting that, although the majority of episodes were set in school settings, no girls ever wore a backpack. Indeed, girls were rarely depicted as holding anything remotely implying they were at school. Sometimes they carried their books in their hands, but the ones who ever did so were typically made fun of for being "nerdy". An example of this is in "Silent Treatment" when London Tipton (fashionista and spoiled daughter of a billionaire) blames Bailey's failed relationship on that fact that she studies too much; Bailey is represented as cute but also as a know-it-all.

I find it interesting that girls rarely carry their school supplies with them, because boys were almost always shown carrying a backpack when in school. That being said, some were made fun of for being "too into" science. For example, Alex makes fun of

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Justin and Zeke in “All About You-Niverse” for holding a used technology recycle drive. She laughs at them for being nerds who believe robots will one day attack.

The Sexualization of Boys

Surprisingly, in addition to girls, boys were sexualized in these television shows. The show with the most sexualization was *Big Time Rush* (BTR).

Here a group of four Minnesotan hockey players who ended their career as athletes and moved to L.A. to pursue a boy band career. These 17-year-olds are supposed to be very attractive and, in one episode, even had to practice avoiding intense fan girls while singing. All four boys had toned, muscular bodies (their shirts came off several times) and are depicted in 80% of the episodes analyzed as negotiating heterosexual romance and relationships. This show is not your typical family sitcom, but is about four young boys trying to make it in an industry in which physical appearance is highly valued. These boys are therefore going to be more likely to align with hegemonic beauty standards.

In the traditional family sitcom show *Wizards of Waverly Place* the father, Jerry Russo, fit what Butsch (1995) calls the “white male working-class buffoon” (p.1). Jerry is the owner of the family diner, is overweight, and is overly-emotional. In “Third Wheel” Harper confides in Jerry her sadness in losing Alex as a friend, to which Jerry responds with his own anecdote about not having many friends growing up, which ends in Harper having to comfort this crying, middle-aged man. Instead of this expression of emotion subverting traditional masculine roles, the laugh-track in the episode demonstrates that his emotional blubbering was something comical, instead of refreshing.

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Additionally, in “Positive Alex” Jerry is represented as an embarrassing, unintelligent dad when, at his son’s basketball game, he eats popcorn off the floor because it’s “still good!” He is too busy finding popcorn on the floor to eat to address the fact that his daughter is acting up, a responsibility reserved for his wife.

Sexualization by Race and Ethnicity

There was a noticeable difference between the sexualization of clothing worn by characters of different races. Aligning with the literature, Latinas were the racial group with the highest amounts of sexualized outfits, black female characters were the second most frequently sexualized, and white female characters were least likely to wear sexualized clothing. As sexualization of men’s clothing was barely present, it cannot be suggested that race played a role in any sexualization that did occur.

Latina characters were sexualized, but only half of the 6 who appeared in the episodes under investigation were stereotyped by ethnicity. One character did, however, manage to fulfill in one episode two prominent Latina stereotypes: the domestic, Catholic and the hot seductress. At the start of the episode, she upheld the stereotypical representations of a good Catholic Latina whose dress covered her completely (although there was sexualized characteristics to this dress), who upheld the strictest and most traditional family values, and who mispronounced her English words (Gill, 1996; Merskin, 2007). But, in a long and frankly unimportant plot-line, she is re-introduced to her love of salsa dancing and, upon returning to the dance floor, she is turned into a hot, spicy salsa dancer whose clothes become far more revealing and whose heels become much higher. Not surprisingly, all of this character’s outfits were categorized as sexualized.

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A second character, Alex Russo, corresponded to Mastro & Behm-Morawitz's (2005) findings that Latinas in primetime television were, among other traits, the least intelligent, most verbally aggressive, and embodied the lowest work ethic.; in short, "Latinas were the laziest characters in primetime" (p.126) In this case, Alex was portrayed as someone who did not try hard in school, who gained pleasure from insulting her brothers and others around her, and who refused to do any work around the family's restaurant. Indeed, the major plotline of one of the episodes is Alex attempting to avoid doing the "real work" of fundraising while still reaping the same benefits of going on a class-trip to Europe. Similarly, in a second episode she makes her boyfriend carry her across several miles because walking is "too hard".

The sexualization of Black women was not as stereotypical as the portrayals of Latinas. The most prominent black female character, Kelly Wainwright, assumed to be in her late 20's/early 30's, was the assistant to a big music producer. In all of her scenes she wore business attire and was either in her office, or on official work business but note that she was sexualized 66% of the time. Of her 15 sexualized outfits, nearly half (46.7%) contained items coded as "ambiguously sexualized", which is understandable knowing what level of sexuality is consistent with other portrayals of black women in the music industry; Rose (1991) and Perry (ed. Dines & Humez, 1995) found for example that Black women were more likely to be hypersexualized in the context of the music industry than out. I did not find any literature which discussed a heightened presence of childish sexualization in black women.

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Finally, the two Black girls were sexualized 100% of the time. Because there were so few black girls depicted in any of the television programs, this portrayal is striking, especially in comparison to white girls who were less likely to be sexualized

The Representation of Heterosexuality

An important question to ask when exploring if girls and women are sexualized is “by or for whom”? As this study shows, 85% of the episodes under investigation perpetuated heterosexuality in some form. This result, in addition to the complete erasure of queer sexualities, aligns with Fredrickson & Roberts (eg. Goodin et al., 2010) who propose that women and girls in Western cultures are widely sexualized as objects of the male gaze. Furthermore, this gaze is framed in a way which makes it normal, and even biological. The normalizing of hetero-romantic exploration and heterosexual gaze is present in the media to a degree which queer sexualities are not.

Hetero-Romantic Relationships

As this study shows, hetero-romantic relationships were central to a majority of episodes analyzed. One example of how this works is captured in an episode that revolves around one of the band members (Carlos), who is set-up with the “perfect” girlfriend by his music producers, just so he could sing their new “girlfriend song” better. The minor plotline focuses on two of the other boy band members juggling their relationships with their busy music producing schedule, while the last member of the band (James) accidentally kisses the girlfriend of Logan, thus producing a very clichéd scene of the two men fist-fighting over a girl.

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A variation of this theme is presented in an episode in which a dispute breaks out at a “webicon”¹⁰ when the audience demands two of the main characters (Carly and Freddie) to be in a relationship. Part of the comedy and drama of this situation is that a boy Carly likes is in the audience, and he believes it when everyone says that she and Freddie are together. Outraged, this boy wants nothing to do with Carly and she desperately finds a way to convince him that she is not interested in Freddie.

Perhaps one of the most clichéd commentaries on heterosexual relationships was found in an episode in which one of the characters is getting married. Zack reminds the character getting married on 8 separate occasions that once he marries, his life is over. Zack gets himself in trouble in another episode when he almost jeopardizes his first relationship with a girl because he believes that he can no longer “bro-out” with his friends, and that his new relationship means the death of his homosocial life.

Although the literature has shown this pattern to be incredibly common, I was still struck by the pervasiveness and framing of such representations of sexuality. Themes of hetero-romantic love were all presented as simply the “struggle of the common teen” and as Kenney (ed. Dines & Humez, 1995) found, heterosexual relationships weren’t represented as anything sexual, but were instead represented as one of those ordinary things teens struggle with after puberty. This, obviously, is completely problematic as it normalizes heterosexuality, and makes deviant any just as commonly occurring queer sexualities teens begin negotiation at puberty.

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Sexiness and Ogling

Many of the episodes made references to sexual desirability and sexual acts. In one, Camille and James kiss, thus Camille “cheats” on Logan, and the two have to figure out which one of them has to tell Logan. Once made up, the couple go to the fair where they ride the “Love Tunnel”; upon exiting the tunnel, Logan’s face is covered in red lipstick kisses and Camille has a smug look on her face.

Several episodes also depicted the ogling of women’s bodies. In one such episode, two teen boys have a video camera. Instead of shooting the news story they were supposed to do, the two become distracted by a pair of attractive teen girls and use their footage to capture the girl’s butts instead, making sounds of pleasure all the while.

Conclusion

Sexualized clothing was present in television programs targeting a pre- and young-teen audience. This study demonstrated in the shows under investigation how girls and women are simultaneously sexualized and childlike; how boys and men are barely sexualized; how characters of color are more sexualized than white characters; and how heteronormativity and heterosexuality are dominating factors in this sexualization. The television programs *Big Time Rush*, *iCarly*, *Suite Life of Deck*, and *Wizards of Waverly Place* demonstrated what scholars have been saying decades: the media has blurred the sexual boundary between girlhood and womanhood; sexualization *does* discriminate against gender and race; and heterosexuality is the sole representation of sexuality.

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Appendix A Code Book

Coding Scheme

Age

1= 18 years or younger; 2=older than 18

Gender

1= girls/women; 2= boys/men; 3= Indeterminable/Other

Race/Ethnicity

1= White; 2= Black; 3= Latina/o; 4= Asian-Pacific Islander; 5= Other

Sexualization

1= yes; 0= no

a= revealed a sexualized body part

b= emphasized a sexualized body part

c= had characteristics associated with sexiness

d= had writing on it with sexualizing content

e= childlike in print/color/cut and/or pattern

CH= childlike; article of clothing exhibits childlike characteristics and no sexualizing characteristics

DS= definitely sexualized; article of clothing exhibits only sexualizing characteristics

AS= ambiguously sexualized; article of clothing exhibits both sexualizing and childlike characteristics

AD= adult like; article of clothing exhibits no childlike characteristic[s] but were also not sexualizing

(HETERO)SEXUAL GROOMING

¹ Since the publication of these studies newer shows featuring families of color such as *The Cleveland Show* have followed similar patterns. Although research does not support this statement, it does seem this masculinity trope is at least prevalent in shows with black male characters.

² One of the shows in my analysis.

³ Shoes with a heel higher than four inches.

⁴ I acknowledge how immensely problematic this third category in relation to the other two categories is to the understanding of gender outside the binary; I by no means wish to reinforce the binary or literally "other" anyone who does not fit into hegemonic Western gender constructions. I made this choice because I anticipated the lack of non-binary gender representation and did not think it would be beneficial to list all options for every gender identity. I also acknowledge the disconnect between someone's gender presentation with their gender identity, and do not wish to imply that if a character had a femme presentation, that they would automatically identify as a woman. That being said, I had no way of verifying gender identities as characters rarely gendered themselves ("I am a woman!") or gendered another ("You are the best big brother"). Acknowledging the imperfections of it, the categories were constructed solely on how I perceived a character's presentation.

⁵ This was not the best way of assessing gender, as "inappropriate gendering" happens frequently i.e. calling someone by a female name as an insult, or the use of dude.

⁶ Again, like gender, this is an incredibly reductive way of looking at race. I acknowledge the disconnect between perceived race/ethnicity and someone's racial/ethnic identity, but contend that I had no better way of coding for this.

⁷ Characters were sexualized by wearing at least one sexualized outfit, and an outfit was sexualized if it consisted of one or more sexualized articles of clothing.

⁸ This includes outfits which have both "definitely sexualized" and "ambiguously sexualized" clothing items, and just "ambiguously sexualized" items. This is how the breakdown goes: Of the 21.6% of "ambiguously sexualized" outfits, 15.4% (n=26) contained articles of clothing coded as both "definitely sexualized" and "ambiguously sexualized" and 6.5% (n=11) contained articles of clothing coded solely as "ambiguously sexualized".

⁹ This girl was supposed to be unattractive and friendless.

¹⁰ The plot of *iCarly* is that three friends produce a webcast once a week. This webcast "iCarly" supposedly has a huge fan following so, in "iStart a Fan War" the gang goes to a "webicon", at which their talk is highly anticipated.