



Mixed Messages: The Portrayal of Adolescent Girls' Emotional Distress in Popular Culture

BETTY IRENE MOORE SCHOOL OF NURSING

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Academic Symposium
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➔ 12 to 13 years

Gender differences in depression diagnoses and depressive symptoms emerge

➔ 5x to 6x greater

Girls outnumber boys in self-harm between ages 12 to 15

➔ 18 years

Young women are twice as likely to experience depression

(Belfer, 2008; Bromet et al., 2011; Hawton et al., 2012; Kann et al., 2014; Telzer & Fuligni, 2013)

Adolescent Girls

- Vulnerable and underserved population in health care research
- Media and popular culture are powerful influences to the identity of adolescent girls

Research Gaps

- Inconsistent findings reported regarding racial/ethnic disparities in adolescent depression
- Identification of socio-cultural influences among adolescent girls

(Burton, 2016; Clarke & Mosleh, 2015; Cvetkovich, 2012; Franko et al., 2005; IOM, 2009; Kessler et al., 2005; Leavy, 2011; Lu, 2019; Salk et al., 2016; Schreiber, 1996)

Research Purpose

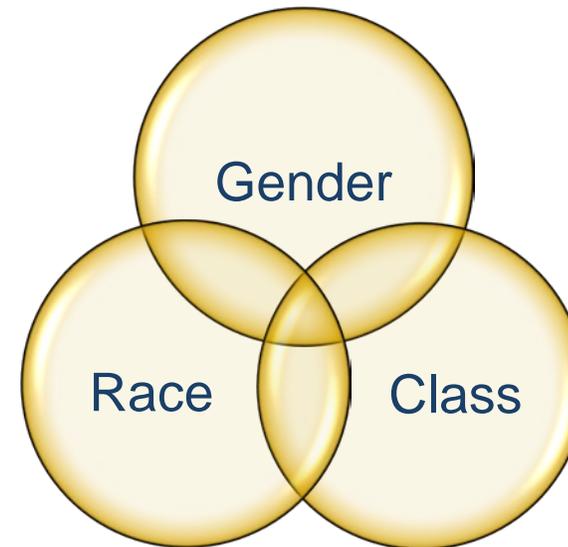
To critically examine how emotional distress and self-harm were portrayed in popular culture magazines targeting adolescent girls.

Methods and Study Design

Qualitative Content Analysis

- Relies on archival documents, such as magazines
- Nonliving, preexisting data

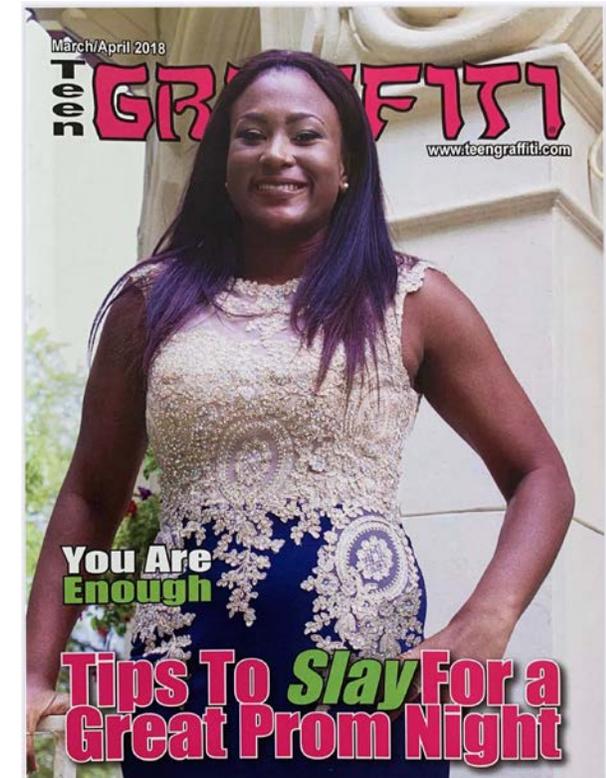
Feminist Intersectional



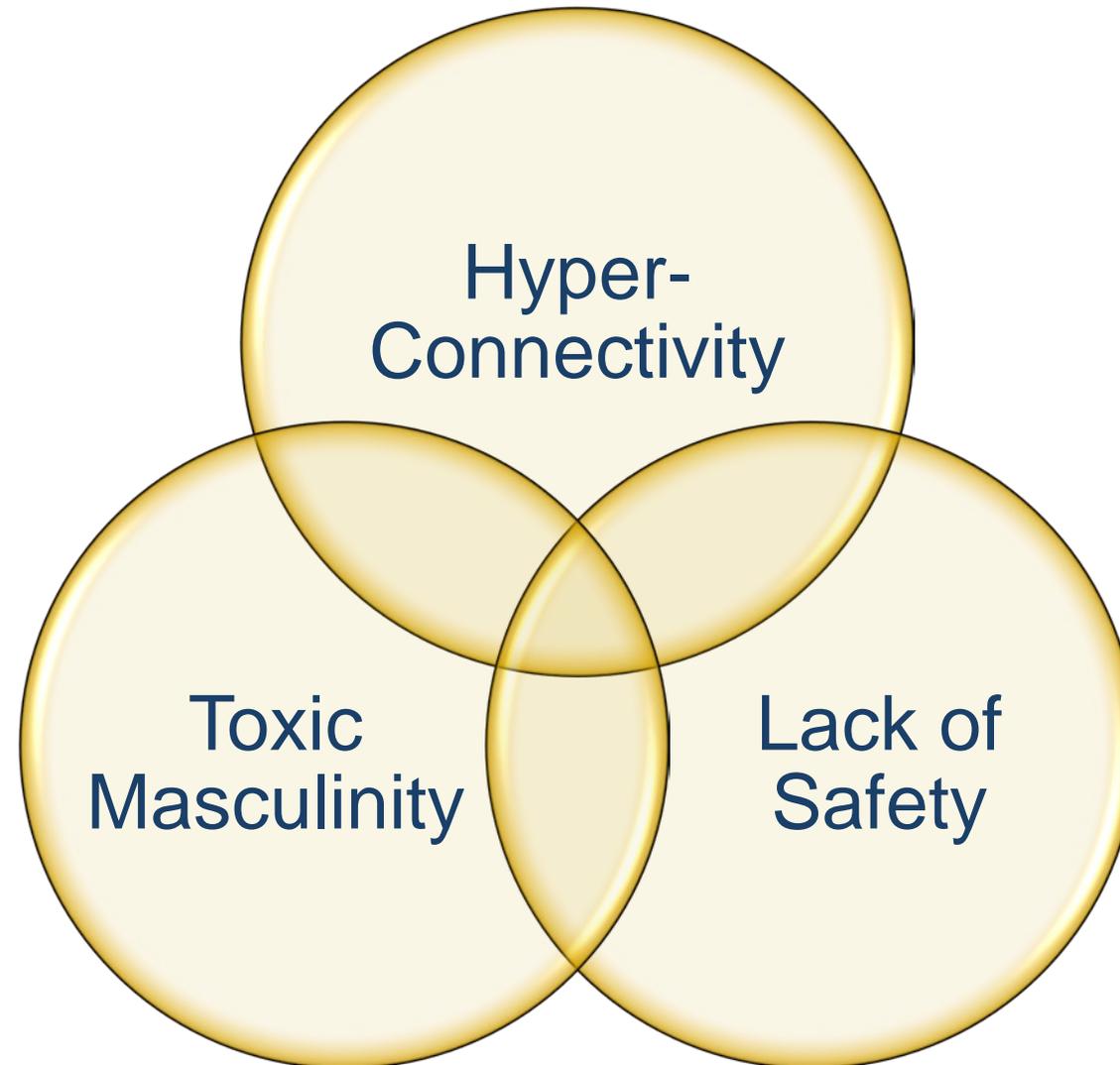
(Charmaz, 2014; Collins, 2004; Leavy, 2011; Lykke, 2010; Schreier, 2012)

Sample

- 25 separate issues published between **January 2018 to January 2019** with textual and visual units of analysis



Findings – *It's Hard Being a Girl*

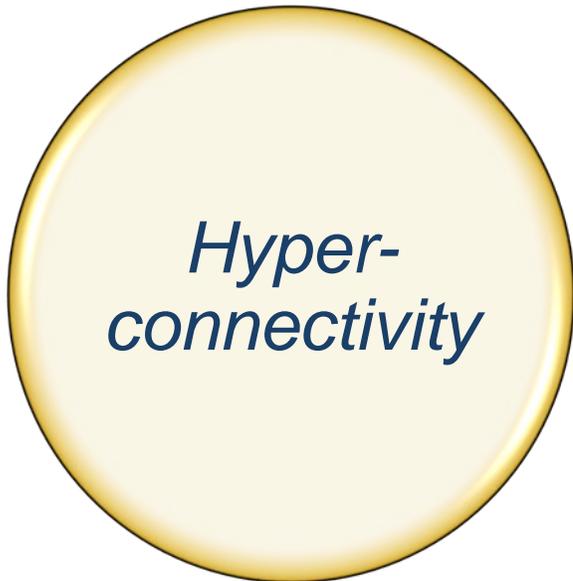


Media Hyper-Connectivity

"I would get this hot, annoyed feeling, not exactly nervousness or anxiety – this new kind of scary feeling."

(Seventeen, Aug/Sep 2018, p. 68)

"I got exposure to a lot of social issues, and it was depressing to realize and see everything that was going on... I'm still trying to figure out how to have a healthy relationship with social media ... being aware of things, being compassionate, but not letting it consume you and keep you in a constant rage." (Sesi, Winter 2018, p. 40)



Streak Stress: Anxiety related to breaking the chain of communication via 'snaps' with friends, the metric for success on Snapchat.

Lack of Safety



Lack of
Safety

“We do lockdown drills, but we don’t do enough to actually make us feel safer...” (Girl’s Life, Aug/Sep 2018, p. 55)

“...I always feel on edge. I’ve had to duck and dodge bullets my whole life... Sometimes my community is treated like a stereotype, like because it’s diverse, it’s normal for us to be violent. It’s not normal. It’s good that after a school shooting everybody comes together and stands up, but they should have been standing up a long time ago. People around me have been dying for a while.” (Seventeen, May/June 2018, p. 99)

Toxic Masculinity and Rape Culture



*Toxic
Masculinity*

“...But none of us said anything. Instead, in the privacy of our own homes, we looked in our mirrors and had our first taste of self-hatred. Suddenly, we weren’t thinking about four square and handball anymore. It was. What do the boys think of how I look? We were 11. We gave those boys our power.” (Seventeen, Mar/Apr 2018, p. 66)

Findings – *Conflicting Femininities*

Traditional Gender Norms

"Feel chill and totally relaxed...The Trick: Hug a guy...When females get a whiff of a male's hair or skin, they immediately feel relaxed...the scent had some sort of calming power on the brain." (Seventeen, Dec 2018/Jan 2019, p. 43)

"Put on some lipstick and pull yourself together...Don't pout, pretty! No matter what you're stressing over, there's one tried-and-true trick when you need a kick of confidence...apply a bold hue to bring out your inner boss babe." (Girl's Life Oct/Nov 2018, p. 42)

What Was Missing?

- Sexual and gender minorities (SGM) were underrepresented
- Limited discussions of Latinx and Asian American women confined the breadth of analysis
- Race was only noted when referencing people of color

So, What Now?

Practice

- Primary care RN mental health screenings
- Expansion of school nursing and school-based services
- Disseminate trauma-informed resources

Education and Research

- Intersectionality in health professions
- Combat stigma
- Offer alternatives to biomedical model



Gratitude - I am so grateful for all of your support and guidance!

Family



I love you Alice & Harry!

Special Thanks

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- Associate Clinical Professor
- Teaching mentor extraordinaire!

Dr. Wendy Ho

- Professor
- Feminist Theory and Research DE Chair

Dissertation Committee



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- Professor Emeritus
- Co-founder of UC Davis Feminist Research Institute

Qualifying Exam Committee

Dr. Janice Bell (chair), Dr. Ester Carolina Apeso-Varano, Dr. Jessica Draughon Moret, Dr. Sheryl Catz, and Dr. Sylvia Garma

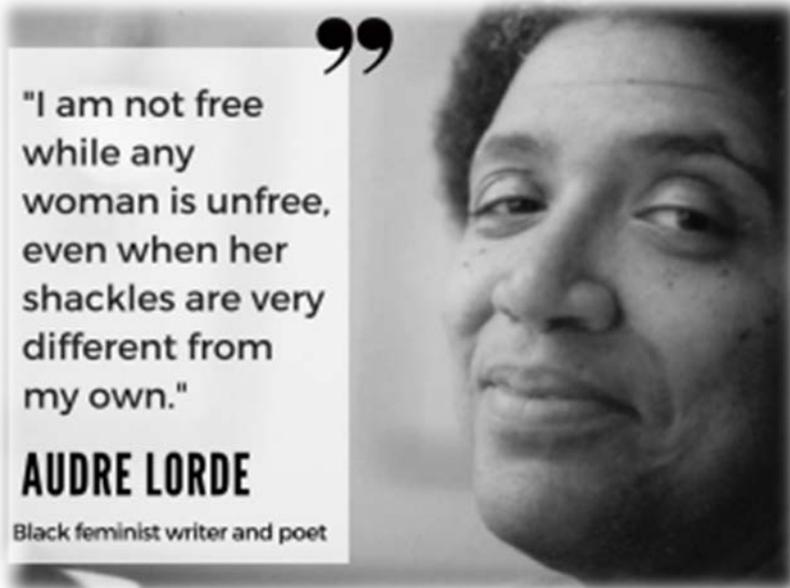
Cohort



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Question and Answer



“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.”

AUDRE LORDE

Black feminist writer and poet

Feel free to contact me with any questions or comments:

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