

The Hills Valley Coalition For Resilient Youth Presents:

# Growing up OVerExposed

*Helping Teens Navigate in a Hyper-Sexualized Digital World*

**An Educational Program For Adults And Teens**

Activist.  
Advocate.  
Lawyer.  
Speaker.  
Parent.



**April 3, 2019**

**Pascack Hills High School  
Doors Open At 6pm**

- **Keynote Speaker 7pm**
- **Mental Health Resource Fair 6-7pm**

Featuring Local Mental Health and  
Addiction Treatment Providers

**Keynote: Lauren Hersh, National Director of "World Without Exploitation"**

Register for this event at  
**[www.hillsvalleycoalition.org](http://www.hillsvalleycoalition.org)**

# Hills Valley Coalition NEWS Spring 2019

The Hills Valley Coalition for Resilient Youth: Serving Hillsdale, Montvale, River Vale & Woodcliff Lake

## Lauren Hersh—When Dating Abuse Meets The Digital World

**Reese requires Rae to keep Snap Map on at all times so she can track Rae's movements.**

*After an argument, Jade finds a way into Maz's Finsta and posts a humiliating pic of Maz.*

**Eli threatens, "If you break up with me, I'm going to take your private videos and make them public."**

This is what it looks like when dating abuse meets the digital world— and teens across the country are the victims.

Here's the reality: teen dating abuse has been an epidemic for decades, with millions of victims each year. The numbers are staggering: 1 in 3 adolescents in the U.S. has been a victim of physical, sexual, emotional and verbal abuse from a partner. Today, the level of online "connectedness" among teens in 2019 provides abusers with new and innovative ways to exercise power and control.

### Take Jess, for example.

Jess (name change) is a high school senior who spoke to me candidly, and with the promise of anonymity about her relationship with Jax. She explained that "things are mostly good. But, at times, Jax gets a little jealous and possessive." When I probed, she

divulged, "he watches where I am through Find My Friends. This one time when I turned it off, he Snapchatted me nonstop and when I didn't respond, he posted a private pic of me on my Finsta with a caption SNEEK-E BITCH."

The more I questioned other teens, the more I saw that Jess was not alone. Many high schoolers I spoke with were tracked on Snap Map, or pressured to share passwords with a dating partner. Others were humiliated on social media or coerced to send private, sexual images by a significant other.

As a former special victims prosecutor who now works with teens and tweens, I can't say I am surprised. Coercion and manipulation have long been tactics used to perpetrate intimate partner violence. But today, these tactics are exacerbated by on-line access.

Constant digital activity creates a dangerous expectation that a person should be accessible, available and "visible" at any given moment. Snaps, texts and emojis have replaced face-to-face conversation and intimacy, causing a severe absence of empathy. Private moments frequently blur into the public sphere, causing chaos, extreme embarrassment and at times, legal consequences.

### It's time to change this, and fast.

Public humiliation, reputation damage and cyber stalking should not be ordinary hazards of dating in 2019. Instead, young peo-

ple need to be given the tools to navigate healthy relationships, which must include candid conversations about healthy digital boundaries. These conversations need to happen in schools, in our communities and in our homes. We need to start talking early (yes, elementary school!) and this dialogue needs to occur often.

Helping a young person navigate the social and emotional complexities of growing up in the Digital Age is nothing short of overwhelming. But empowering teens

### Here are a few suggestions:

- Talk to your teen, but more importantly LISTEN.
- Discuss the importance of boundaries: in the digital world and within a relationship.
- Help them understand that no one should be cyber-tracking them on Snap Map or Find My Friends or anywhere.
- Explain that when love is used to manipulate ("if you love me, you would..."), it is not love. Repeat this over and over.

to set healthy boundaries and foster mutual respect in their real and wired worlds will help them build healthy relationship skills for life.

**By Lauren Hersh, National Director of "World Without Exploitation."**

### A PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE (APFC)

is a non-profit organization that provides educational programs to address the lack of knowledge around the epidemic of intimate partner violence and dating abuse. The agency was co-founded in November 2007 by Allison Bressler, MA and Gloria Sgrizzi who together have more than 30 years of experience in the field. They recognized if first responders did not understand the issue, what prevents victims for reaching out for help or how to effectively respond to victims, then victims most certainly were not aware of the important

services available that would help them receive the support they needed. APFC's community presentations are excellent channels in which to reach **primary victims, secondary victims** (people who have a friend or family member who is a victim or people who were exposed to domestic violence in childhood), **helpers** (professionals such as school counselors, police officers, social workers, nurses, teachers, clergy, etc), and friends, neighbors, or co-workers of victims. Since its inception, APFC has educated more than 18,000 (first responders, helpers, family members and students

combined) on this important issue. This organization is providing a two year grant program to the Pascack Valley Regional School District on teen dating abuse. The program includes student assembly presentations, staff in-service and a follow-up teen leadership advocate program called **PowerBack**, that meets monthly with interested students. **A special thanks to APFC!**



# Where Did the Hypersexualized Teen Come From?

Andrews and Grossman-Scott feel that the gender specific sexualized toys and games teenagers played when they were younger lead them to the video games, magazines and music they discovered as adolescents. In addition, billboards, TV ads and fashion expose teens to very sensationalized informa-



tion about sex and sexuality at a time when they are seeking information on sexuality, and what it means to be a man or a woman.

Girls receive the message that their principal value is to be sex objects for males. Boys receive the message that violence and sex go hand in hand, and that women don't need to be valued for their humanity and individual-

ity. Girls are exposed to a narrow definition of "pretty" and those who differ from the "ideal" image may develop a disgust of their own bodies, which can lead to depression, anxiety and self-harming behavior.

Teens reference "hooking up," referring to having casual sex with multiple partners without love or affection, which robs young people of the experience they need to learn how to form emotionally intimate, lasting relationships. Andrews and Grossman-Scott conclude that educating ourselves and our kids, and becoming media literate or "media savvy" are the first steps in overcoming the effects of our hyper-sexualized culture.

In addition to becoming "media savvy," as Andrews and Grossman-Scott recommend, it is important to recognize past attitudes toward sexuality, gender messaging, and the role of social media. It is essential that parents be positive role models for their children, and display respect in family relationships. Open communication and valuing diversity is important. Parents are encouraged to empower their sons and

daughters with the confidence to accept their own individuality.

**Summary and Review by Ronnie B. Silver, LDTC, Founder and Director, Adelphi Educational Services**

Andrews, C. and Grossman-Scott, A. (n.d.)  
*Where did the hypersexualized teen come from?*  
Retrieved from: <https://educateempowerkids.org/hypersexualized-kids/>

## RESOURCES:

**A Partnership for Change-APFC**  
Teen Dating Abuse  
[allison@apartnershipforchange.org](mailto:allison@apartnershipforchange.org)

**YWCA Healing Space**  
[healingspace@ywcabergencounty.org](mailto:healingspace@ywcabergencounty.org)  
Hotline: 201-487-2227

**Alternatives to Domestic Violence-ADV**  
201-336-7526  
Hotline: 201-336-7575

**Center for Hope and Safety**  
201-498-9247  
Hotline: 201-944-9600

## Facts About Rape Culture & Victim Blaming

**Rape culture is defined as** "an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture" (Southern, 2018). Often people victim-blame to distance themselves from the discomfort with talking about the topic of sexual violence. A victim-blaming attitude is dangerous and marginalizes the victim/survivor, making it harder to come forward and report abuse (Southern, 2018).

### What Does Victim-Blaming Look Like?

**Example of Victim-Blaming Attitude:** "She must have provoked him into being abusive. They both need to change."

**Reality:** This statement assumes that the victim is equally to blame for the abuse, when in reality, abuse is a conscious choice

### Examples Of Rape Culture:

- Blaming the victim ("She/He asked for it!")
- Trivializing sexual assault ("Boys will be boys!")
- Sexually explicit jokes
- Tolerance of sexual harassment

made by the abuser. Abusers have a choice in how they react to their partner's actions. Options alternative to abuse: walking away, talking in the moment, respectfully explaining why the action is frustrating, breaking up, etc.

### How to Combat Rape Culture and Victim Blaming:

- Avoid using language that objectifies or degrades gender or homophobic language
- Speak out if you hear someone else making an offensive joke or trivializing sexual aggression
- If a friend says he or she has been abused, take your friend seriously and be supportive
- Let survivors know that it is not his/her fault
- Hold abusers accountable for their actions: do not let them make excuses like blaming the victim, alcohol, or drugs for their behavior
- Always communicate with sexual partners and do not assume consent
- Be an active bystander if someone confides in you regarding a sexual assault or teen dating abuse

### Dating Abuse and Sexual Assault Facts:

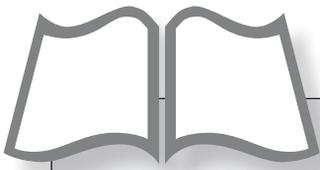
- **FACT:** Sexual offenders come from all educational, occupational, racial and cultural backgrounds. They are "ordinary" and "normal" individuals who sexually assault victims to assert power and control over them and inflict violence, humiliation, and degradation.
- **FACT:** As many as one-third of all high school and college-age young people experience violence in an intimate or dating relationship.
- **FACT:** Most sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows. Studies show that approximately 80%-90% of women reporting sexual assaults knew their abuser.
- **FACT:** Survivors exhibit a spectrum of emotional responses to assault: calm, hysteria, laughter, anger, apathy, shock. Each survivor copes with the trauma of the assault in a different way.

**Summarized by Danielle Jenkins, Asst. Hills Valley Coalition Coordinator.**

Southern Connecticut State University. (2018). *Rape culture, victim blaming, and the facts.*  
Retrieved from: <http://www.southernct.edu/sexual-misconduct/facts.html>

**Hills Valley  
Coalition**

**Quarterly meetings are held at the Montvale Municipal Complex, 12 Mercedes Drive.**  
For more information about the Hills Valley Coalition should contact the HVC Co-Coordiators.  
Gale Mangold [gmangold@pascack.org](mailto:gmangold@pascack.org) and Danielle Jenkins [djenkins@pascack.org](mailto:djenkins@pascack.org)



# Book Club Corner

## So Sexy So Soon:

### The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids

By Diane E Levin Ph.D., Jean Kilbourne Ed D., Authors

*So Sexy So Soon* is a practical guide for parents that are concerned and even scared about the hyper-sexualized shift in societal norms and the impact of early exposure on our kids. "Popular culture and technology inundate our children with an onslaught of mixed messages at earlier ages than ever before." Products like thong panties, padded bras, and risqué Halloween costumes are aimed at tweens. There are T-shirts for toddlers that boast "Chick Magnet" as well. Toys for children to imitate "sexy" such as Bratz dolls and clothes, popular song lyrics, sexually graphic TV shows, commercial advertising, and sexually violent video games are all marketed for children. Every television channel has sexual content. Easy access to the internet with computers and phones makes it a daunting task to try to filter what our kids are exposed to.

Teens are hyper-sexualized with early sexual experiences void of emotional intimacy. Girls are obsessed with what is perceived as popular, pretty and thinness to be "sexy." The pop stars are held up for our young daughters to emulate, and boys are deceived as to what constitutes masculinity as they are inundated with violent images from the gaming industry.

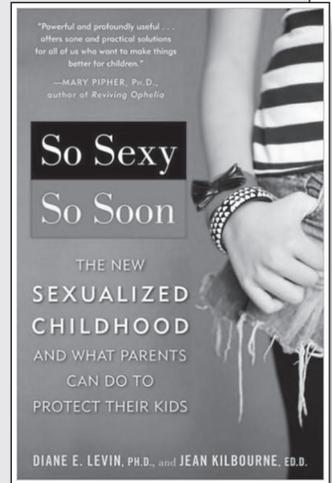
The co-authors Diane Levin Ph.D. and Jean Kilbourne Ed.D., internationally recognized early childhood experts, conclude that the social trend is disturbing and the impact is far reaching as our kids don't have the emotional sophistication to understand what they are seeing or doing. Many teens are dressing provoca-

tively, and may eventually engage in precocious sexual behavior before they have even reached puberty. This important read is helpful to parents as it provides many useful strategies and guidance to help combat this issue. "Parents are left shaking their heads, wondering: How did this happen? What can we do? *So Sexy So Soon* is an invaluable and practical guide for parents who are fed up, confused, and even scared by what their kids-or their kid's friends-do and say." (Levin & Kilbourne, 2008)

"*So Sexy So Soon* provides parents with the information, skills, and confidence they need to discuss sensitive topics openly and effectively so their kids can just be kids." (Levin & Kilbourne, 2008)

Reviewed by Gale Mangold SAC, Pascack Hills High School

Levin, D. E., & Kilbourne, J. (2008). *So sexy so soon: The new sexualized childhood and what parents can do to protect their kids*. New York, NY, US: Ballantine Books.



## "Overexposed and Under-prepared": A Summary and Review

According to a 2012 blog post in *Psychology Today*, our children are over-exposed to sexual content in the media and parents have a critical role in managing risks. Dr. Carolyn Ross highlighted many problems

### American Academy of Pediatrics strategies for talking to your kids about sex and sexuality during puberty:

- Talk about sex early and often
- Use the media to launch conversations
- Avoiding judgment even about fictional characters and instead of having a dialogue or collaboratively role-play a situation on TV

related to exposure to sexual content including earlier sex, high-risk sex, sexual violence, sex addiction, love, and relationships. While clearly not every child who is exposed to sex via the media develops any or all of these problems, the article described possible links between early exposure and problematic sexual development.

### Dr. Carolyn Ross advocates that parents:

- Create and maintain limits around screen usage and "screen time"
- Use internet filters and parental controls
- Talk to kids about the accuracy and intent of what they are seeing, including media depictions of sex and relationships
- Model for your kids (for ex, self-worth, and a healthy sense of respect in relationships)

These recommendations could be augmented with research and strategies from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). For example, check out the AAP's articles on Children, Adolescents, and Digital Media and the Family Media Plan to manage digital consumption. Children may be overexposed. However, surrounded by parents and a caring community, we can

help prepare them by having those difficult conversations and providing them with the resources they need.

**By Dr. Marianne G. Dunn**, Assistant Professor at The College of Saint Elizabeth in the Psychology Department, a Licensed Psychologist (NJ #5656) in Private Practice in River Vale and a mother of 3 kids 5 and under. This reflects Dr. Dunn's personal viewpoints and analysis, not intended as medical/psychological advice. Dr. Dunn can be reached at [marianne@drmarriannedunn.com](mailto:marianne@drmarriannedunn.com)

Psychology Today. (2012). *Overexposed and under-prepared: the effects of early exposure to sexual content: is the internet impacting sexual development?* Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/real-healing/201208/overexposed-and-under-prepared-the-effects-early-exposure-sexual-content>

American Academy of Pediatrics. (n.d.). *Family media plan*. Retrieved from: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>

The Hills Valley Coalition For Resilient Youth Presents:

## Growing up OVERexposed

Helping Teens Navigate in a Hyper-Sexualized Digital World

**An Educational Program For Adults And Teens**

**April 3, 2019**  
**Pascack Hills High School**  
**Doors Open At 6pm**

- Keynote Speaker 7pm
- Mental Health Resource Fair 6-7pm

Featuring Local Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Providers