

Introduction

“Hot dammit
Your booty like two planets
Go head and go ham sandwich
Whoa, I can’t stand it
‘Cause you know what to do with that big fat butt
Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle”¹
Jason Derulo

It doesn’t take much imagination to decipher the meaning of “ham sandwich” in the lyric from *Wiggle* cited above, but rapper Snoop Dog offers further explanation later in the song: “Completely separated/Till I deeply penetrate it/Then I take it out and wipe it off/Eat it, ate it, love it, hate it.”

Wiggle peaked at number 5 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart in June 2014.² In March of 2015, the song’s video had more than 499 million views and over 1.6 million “likes” on *YouTube*. By December of the same year, the numbers had increased to more than 670 million views and some 2.3 million likes. By all standards *Wiggle* was a monster hit, despite lyrics that would give most parents fits.

For the uninitiated, the words in *Wiggle* may seem shocking but they are standard fare in a popular music landscape littered with overtly sexual language and imagery. Whether they go the direct route—as rapper 2Chainz does when he rhymes “genius” with “suck my penis” on Derulo’s other top ten hit *Talk Dirty*—or take a more indirect approach with euphemistic turns of phrase like “taste my raindrops” (an allusion to oral sex, also from *Wiggle*), musical artists are not holding back when it comes to explicit descriptions of sex.

Although the coarse language many artists employ might seem edgy or radical to young listeners, it actually reflects some very dated and traditional attitudes. Primary among them are stereotypes of men as aggressive “sexual animals”³ and women as passive sexual objects. Or, in the language of Derulo and Snoop Dogg, women as big fat butts to be penetrated by men. The video for *Wiggle* lays out these stereotypes within its first few seconds, showing Derulo in bed with eight women before cutting to shots of more women twerking in barely-there shorts and Snoop Dogg leering at them through an oversized pair of binoculars.

¹ Derulo, Jason. “Wiggle” *YouTube* May 21, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiP14ED28CA> Accessed February 20, 2015.

² *Billboard* Chart History: Jason Derulo <http://www.billboard.com/artist/304245/jason-derulo/chart> Accessed March 2, 2015.

³ Zhang, Yuanyuan et al. “The Relationship Between Exposure to Sexual Music Videos and Young Adults’ Sexual Attitudes” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 52, no. 3 (2008), p. 369.

Stereotyped sexual content is not limited to music, of course. It can be found in video games, magazines, advertising, and X-rated films. Variations on the theme of sex-starved males and sexed-up females also appear in the films and television programs aimed at an adolescent audience. This highly sexualized media environment creeps in on teens during a crucial period of their development; a time of “dramatic transformation” when boys and girls are trying to establish an identity of their own, independent of their parents. As psychologists Amy Slater and Marika Tiggeman note, adolescence is also a “time of increased introspection and self-consciousness” when teens become preoccupied with their image and what other people think.⁴ Choices about music and other entertainment are a way for teens to telegraph their identity to others and show that they fit in with their peer group.

So what happens when the media with which teens choose to identify is blatantly sexual and sexist? That is a question that haunts many parents.

Parents of daughters can choose from an abundance of resources about the effects of sexy media on girls. The sexualization of girlhood has, justifiably, become a major topic of conversation, with multiple books being published about the subject in 2014 alone. Female sex role stereotypes, sexual objectification, and body image have also garnered headlines.

For parents of boys it is a different story. Although boys growing up in our highly sexualized media environment face many of the same issues as girls, discussions of boys’ sexual development focus disproportionately on pornography and sexual aggression. This narrow scope leaves boys cast primarily as aggressive consumers of sexualized female bodies rather than people with their own questions and insecurities about sex.

This is not to say that male sexual aggression isn’t a problem. While I was writing this book, stories of harassment and assault made headlines with shocking regularity. News of gang rapes in India⁵ and Steubenville, Ohio⁶ emerged shortly after I started writing, soon to be followed by the tragic stories of Rehtaeh Parsons⁷ and Audrie Pott.⁸ Both girls took their own lives after

⁴ Slater, Amy and Marika Tiggemann. “Body Image and Distorted Eating in Adolescent Girls and Boys: A Test of Objectification Theory.” *Sex Roles* 63, no. 1-2 (2010) p. 42.

⁵ Timmons, Heather. “Woman Dies After Gang Rape That Galvanized India” *New York Times* December 28, 2012
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/29/world/asia/condition-worsens-for-victim-of-gang-rape-in-india.html?_r=0 Accessed March 6, 2014.

⁶ Schiller, Bill. “Steubenville Big Red football players stand trial on sex charges” *Toronto Star* March 9, 2013.
http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/03/09/steubenville_big_red_football_players_stand_trial_on_sex_charges.html Accessed March 9, 2013.

⁷ CBC News. “Rape, bullying led to N.S. teen’s death, says mom” CBC News Online. April 9, 2013.
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/story/2013/04/09/ns-rehtaeh-parsons-suicide-rape.html> Accessed April 9, 2013.

⁸ Mendoza, Martha. “Girl, 15, hangs herself after photos of alleged sexual assault posted online; 3 U.S. teens charged” *Toronto Star* April 12, 2013.

being gang raped then harassed when pictures of the crimes committed against them were circulated among their peers. Later, sexual assault allegations against CBC broadcaster Jian Ghomeshi and American comedian Bill Cosby surfaced, as did stories of online sexual harassment by male members of the Faculty of Dentistry at Dalhousie University.

In *Boy, Sex & Media* I will address the male sexual aggression evident in those crimes, along with related subjects like female sexual objectification, rape myths, and confusion over consent. But I will also look at topics that are rarely considered in discussions of boys and sex— sexual health and education, male sex role stereotypes, and body image—remembering that boys are just as confused and uncertain as girls about sex, yet often left to figure things out on their own, within the pressure cooker of societal expectations about manhood and masculinity.

In our society, masculinity and sexual identity are closely linked and boys with more sexual experience are often considered more “manly.” Boys who are tentative around girls or shy about their emerging sexuality can suffer in a sexualized culture that teaches them to embrace their inner Lothario and become lusty pursuers of sex. Sexual harassment affects some 40% of middle- and high-school-aged boys in the United States and about half of the cases involve a boy being called “gay” in a negative way,⁹ a sign that his manhood is being called into question.

The male body is another indicator of masculinity and it is being displayed in an increasingly sexual manner in pop culture and advertising. This emphasis on the eroticized male physique is one reason that body dissatisfaction—an affliction that has long plagued girls—is becoming more common among boys.

In a media culture where the consequences of unsafe sex are rarely discussed, sexual health is also an area of concern for boys, particularly sexually transmitted infections (STIs) which are increasing sharply among teens of both sexes.

As the examples above demonstrate, there is real potential in our sexualized media environment for negative impacts on boys. Indeed, research has shown that media can, and often do, affect boys’ sexual socialization. But media is just one element of the culture that surrounds boys. That culture—the “enduring behaviors, ideas, attitudes, and traditions shared by a large group of people and transmitted from one generation to the next”¹⁰—also includes parents and peers, two groups of people who play a significant role in shaping a boy’s understanding and reception of media messages about sex. This book considers the influence of all three—media, parents, and peers—as it guides parents to a better understanding of how and where their sons learn about sex. It discusses the various issues facing boys and concludes with some tips and advice for parents.

http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/04/12/girl_15_hangs_herself_after_photos_of_alleged_sexual_assault_posted_online_3_us_teen_charged.html Accessed April 12, 2013.

⁹ Hill, Catherine and Holly Kearl. *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School*. Washington: AAUW, 2011, p. 11-12.

¹⁰ Myers, D.G. *Social Psychology*. 11th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012, p. 11.

In *Boys, Sex & Media* I look primarily at boys in the middle- and high-school years, sharing research on how sexualized media affect their current and future attitudes about sex and sexual roles. Although boys may not become fully physically mature until well into their teenage years, messages about sex can reach them at a significantly younger age so a wide age range is important here.

Sexualized media have a decidedly heterosexual focus and so does this book. This is not to suggest that homosexuality has no place in a discussion of boys and sexualized media, but that the unique concerns of gay teens are outside the scope of this book. That being said, the examination of sexual health and body image in *Boys, Sex and Media* applies to boys of all sexual orientations.

In researching *Boys, Sex & Media*, I put my degree in library and information science to good use, scouring academic journals in a variety of disciplines for recent articles about sexualized media, masculinity, pornography, body image, sexual harassment, rape culture and myths, and sexual objectification of both sexes. I also studied psychological and communications theories about media impact on attitudes and behaviour, and the role parents and peers play in preventing negative media messages from taking root. My research is focused predominantly in North America, but also includes studies and news stories from the UK, Europe, and Australia.

A British MP once said “parents are powerless” against sexualized media.¹¹ That is not true. The goal of this book is to show parents exactly how much power they have, even against the seemingly endless tide of sexual content that threatens daily to overwhelm their sons.

¹¹ Lyons, James. “‘We need a sex education revolution’: Parents powerless over sexualisation of children, MP Diane Abbott claims.” *The Mirror*, January 22, 2013.
<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/parents-powerless-over-sexualisation-of-children-1548660>
Accessed February 16, 2013.