

# Girls on the Edge

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*Please note: this hand-out is intended as a **supplement** to the presentation, not as a **substitute** for the presentation. This handout is NOT intended to be read separately from the presentation; it cannot “stand alone.” If you would like to get a sense of the presentation but did not have the opportunity to attend, please read my third book **Girls on the Edge**, especially chapters 1, 2, and 3; the 2017 update of my book **Why Gender Matters**; and my latest book **The Collapse of Parenting**. You can reach me at [mrcad@verizon.net](mailto:mrcad@verizon.net) but please also send a copy to my personal email [leonardsax@gmail.com](mailto:leonardsax@gmail.com).*

Teenage girls today are more likely to be anxious; more likely to have an eating disorder; more likely to be abusing alcohol; and much more likely to be engaging in NSSI, compared with girls from the same demographic in previous generations. The first graphs I showed, showing a rise in depressive symptoms among girls, are taken from the comprehensive review of current scholarly literature documenting a recent rise in adolescent mood disorders, co-edited by Professor Jean Twenge, online at <https://tinyurl.com/TeenMentalHealthReview>.

## The sexualization of girlhood

American Psychological Association, “Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls,” full text available online at <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/index.aspx>.

Barbara Fredrickson and colleagues, “That swimsuit becomes you: sex differences in self-objectification, restrained eating, and math performance,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, volume 75, pp. 269 – 284, 1998. Fredrickson and her team replicated this finding in a more recent paper (lead author Diane Quinn, but only with women subjects), “The disruptive effect of self-objectification on performance,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, volume 30, pp. 59 – 64, 2006.

## Social media

Mike Stefanone: girls post more photos on their social media page than boys do; and the girls are more likely to point the camera at themselves. Michael A. Stefanone, Derek Lackaff, and Devan Rosen, "Contingencies of self-worth and social-networking-site behavior," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14:41-49, 2011.

Stefanone and colleagues concluded that "Females tended to spend more time managing their profiles and shared more photos online. This was the case regardless of which dimension of self-worth influenced their behavior, and regardless of the size of their offline social support network. Females also identified more strongly with the appearance CSW" (p. 48; CSW = "contingency of self-worth") The statement that "Females also identified more strongly with the appearance contingency of self-worth" is a scholarly way of saying that physical appearance determined self-worth for females more so than for males, and that the effect was significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). See also my article for the *New York Times*, "Why do girls tend to have more anxiety than boys?" April 21 2016, <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/04/21/why-do-girls-have-more-anxiety-than-boys/>.

Other scholars have extended this finding to note that girls are more likely than boys to post sexually-appealing or sexually-provocative photos of themselves. See Teens, gender, and self-presentation in social media" by Susan Herring and Sanja Kapidzic: this review is available at no cost at <http://info.ils.indiana.edu/~herring/teens.gender.pdf>. These scholars conclude that "in their visual presentations girls most often choose pictures that indicate a desire to appear attractive and sexually appealing" while that was less true, or not at all true, for boys. Jessica Ringrose and her colleagues have documented the emerging sexual double standard in social media, where girls feel pressure to present themselves sexually, and boys don't. See their paper "Teen girls, sexual double standards, and sexting: gendered value in digital image exchange," *Feminist Theory*, volume 14, pp. 305 – 323, 2013.

Nicola Doring and her colleagues published a study of Instagram selfies, showing that teenage girls are much more likely to post sexualized poses, lying on their backs, etc. while the boys are much more likely to post selfies of themselves lifting something heavy, showing off their muscles etc. Their paper is titled "How gender-stereotypical are selfies?" *Computers in Human Behavior*, volume 55, pp. 955 – 962, 2016. See also the recent scholarly paper by Izaskun Sarabia and Ana Estevez, "Sexualized behaviors on Facebook," *Computers in Human Behavior*, volume 61, pp 219 – 226, 2016, which reinforces many of these same points.

Jacqueline Nesi and Mitchell Prinstein, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 2015, found that the more time kids spend on social media, looking to see how many likes they got on their own posts, and looking to see what other kids were doing online, the more likely those kids were to *become* depressed. Full text (including that amazing graph, showing that girls were more likely to become depressed than boys were) is online at no charge at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5985443/>.

### **Sexting (rare) and Not-Quite-Sexting (common)**

*Pediatrics*, September 17 2012: Rice et al., “Sexually explicit cell phone messaging associated with sexual risk among adolescents”, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22987882>.

*Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, Jeff Temple and colleagues, “Teen sexting and its association with sexual behaviors”, <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1212181>.

Not-quite-sexting (*New York Magazine*, “They Know What Boys Want”)

No child under 13 years of age should have a smartphone. That doesn't mean that all 13-year-olds should have smartphones. It depends.

I recommend that parents deploy programs such as NetNanny, MyMobileWatchdog, TeenSafe, or mSpy. “mSpy” is a terrible name, because you are NOT spying: you TELL your child that it is your job to know what they are doing online. You explain that **it is the parent's job** to be aware of how much time their kids are spending online, and which sites they are visiting.

**2021 update:** NetNanny and MyMobileWatchdog have significantly DECREASED the power of their apps. They no longer enable monitoring of photos taken with the phone, and they do not allow monitoring of SnapChat and similar apps where photos “vanish.” MSpy **does** allow monitoring of photos and apps such as SnapChat. For more information, see <https://www.mspy.com/>.

Many of the apps listed below are NOT stable on the iPhone. They can be uninstalled without the parent knowing – then reinstalled, so the parent doesn't know what happened while the app was off the phone. Some of the apps listed below say that they work on the iPhone. I hear different reports from parents: some say it works on the iPhone, others say it can be uninstalled without their knowledge. If you are concerned, **switch from Apple (iPhone) to Android (most other phones)**. I have no affiliation with Apple or Android or Samsung or anybody else.

Here are apps which parents have found useful:

**Bark:** monitors text messages, YouTube, and other social networks. Works on Apple and Android. <https://www.bark.us/>.

**Screentime:** <https://screentimelabs.com/>. Works on Apple and Android.

**Circle:** manages connected devices wherever they are. Works on Apple and Android. <https://meetcircle.com>.

**Eset parental control:** monitors content and limits screen time. Works only on Android. <https://www.eset.com/us/>.

**Qustodio:** monitors content including YouTube, limits screen time, easy-to-use dashboard from your own laptop. Works best on Android. <https://www.qustodio.com/en/>

Another excellent option, as discussed in the presentation, is to give your child a "basic phone" - a phone that can make and receive phone calls and texts, but not surf the Internet or take photos.

No devices in the bedroom! – i.e. phones, and no UNSUPERVISED Internet access. Here's a link: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/pages/media-and-children.aspx>. The full text of the AAP guidelines, as published in the journal *Pediatrics*, is available at no charge at this link:

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/138/5/e20162592.full.pdf>.

Here's a link from the AAP to create a "family contract" for kids' use of media:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>.

You should take the mobile devices away from kids at 9 pm (the latest) and plug them into the charger. The charger stays in the parent's bedroom.

Who is responsible when kids send pictures on their cell phone? My answer: PARENTS are responsible. See my op-ed October 25 2013 for the *Wall Street Journal*, <http://on.wsj.com/1dp0OXO>. See also my discussion of this topic on Fox News, October 29 2013, <http://video.foxnews.com/v/2781648798001>.

The parent's job is to be a parent, not a best friend. A best friend can't tell you what to eat, or take away your phone at 9 pm; but a parent can, and must.

## Cutting / NSSI

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI): rates for girls are going up; rates for boys are going down (Muehlenkamp et al.). In some community surveys, rates for girls are as high as 34% (Hilt & Nolen-Hoeksema). In one Canadian study (Nixon), rates of NSSI were 24% for teenage girls and young adults, vs 8% for Canadian boys. In another Canadian study, rates of NSSI for women in the criminal justice system ranged from 24% to 38%.

Beware the copycat phenomenon. Some girls are now showing their cuts to other girls.

NSSI has become common among Anglophone girls and young women. Megan Fox, Angelina Jolie, Drew Barrymore, Lindsey Lohan, Demi Lovato, the late Amy Winehouse, the late Diana Princess of Wales, Christina Ricci, and Lady Gaga, among others, all report a history of NSSI. Most are cutters; Christina Ricci burned herself with cigarettes and said it was “calming.”

Why are so many girls cutting? Because they are anxious. Why are they so anxious? Because they are:

- Disconnected from adults;
- Hyperconnected to peers;
- Uncertain about sexual norms;
- Immersed in a culture with a relentless focus on superficials;
- Culture sets them up for the Great Disappointment;
- No chance to develop an authentic sense of self

Here are some comments about my books:

**Why Gender Matters** “. . . is a lucid guide to male and female brain differences.”

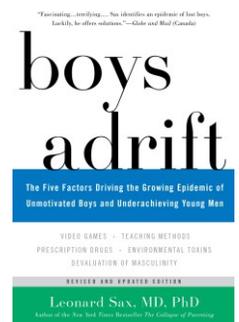
*New York Times*

**Boys Adrift** “. . . is powerfully and persuasively presented. . . Excellent and informative references and information are provided.”

*Journal of the American Medical Association*

**Boys Adrift:** “A must-read for any parent of boys. This is real science, and Dr. Sax thoroughly uncovers the important health issues that parents of boys need to be tuned into.”

*Dr. Mehmet Oz, host of “The Dr. Oz Show”*



**Girls on the Edge:** *“Packed with advice and concrete suggestions for parents, Girls on the Edge is a treasure trove of rarely-seen research on girls, offering families guidance on some of the most pressing issues facing girls today. Dr Sax’s commitment to girls’ success comes through on every page.”*

*Rachel Simmons, author of Odd Girl Out*

**Girls on the Edge:** *“This is essential reading for parents and teachers, and one of the most thought-provoking books on teen development available.”*

*Library Journal*

**Girls on the Edge:** *“The best book about the current state of girls and young women in America . . . offers astonishing and troubling new insight . . .”*

*The Atlantic*

**The Collapse of Parenting:** *“One of the premier experts on parenting, Dr. Leonard Sax brilliantly articulates the problems parents experience with their children, then gives solutions. **The Collapse of Parenting** is academic but practical, simple but deep. If you have time to read only one book this year, read this one.”*

*Meg Meeker MD, author of **Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters** and **Strong Mothers, Strong Sons***

**The Collapse of Parenting:** *“With years of experience and research working directly with parents and children, Dr. Leonard Sax provides an important glimpse into parenting in modern times, where it’s gone wrong, and how to fix it. Being a parent has never been more important and Dr. Sax explains how to avoid parenting pitfalls and raise your children well.”*

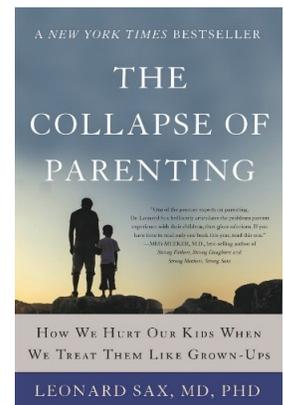
*Bill Bennett PhD, former US Secretary of Education*

**The Collapse of Parenting:** *“A comprehensive breakdown of where parents have gone awry and how they can get back on track to teach virtue and character to their children. . . .Sax provides a series of easy-to-follow solutions that help bring parents and children back to the same page, working toward a healthier, more respectful, and conscientious attitude. . . .With the author’s solid advice, parents have a good shot at achieving these goals.”*

*Kirkus Reviews*

*If you're going to read one book on parenting this year, make it **The Collapse of Parenting** by Leonard Sax. What makes a good nonfiction instructional book is an author who has extensive real world experience in the subject matter and who has the ability to write clearly. Leonard Sax has both.... This is quite simply a good book that is easily read and will provide sound advice for giving our children the best chance to succeed in life.*

*New York Journal of Books*



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