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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communication and the Arts
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Submission from Women's Health Queensland Wide Inc (Women's Health) into the Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media Environment

About Women's Health Queensland Wide

Women's Health Queensland Wide Inc (Women's Health) is a statewide health promotion, information and education service, run for women by women. We promote women's health by working with individuals, community groups, organisations and government. We believe that all aspects of women's lives affect their health and wellbeing. We aim to provide a range of options for women so they can make informed choices about their own health. For further information on our organisation visit www.womhealth.org.au

Terms of Reference

(A) Examine the sources and beneficiaries of premature sexualisation of children in the media

While there are numerous examples of the sexualisation of children based on individual illustrations in the media (eg., particular advertisements), we have instead concentrated on broader sources that are of particular concern.

Source 1: The expansion of adult entertainment brands into the mainstream media

In recent years there has been a rapid growth of the adult entertainment brand, Playboy, in the media environment. Playboy's brand expansion appears to be reliant on recreating the brand so it is no longer just associated with the adult entertainment industry. The major new target market, therefore, are those less familiar with Playboy's adult entertainment links, namely young women and girls. This shift in branding is evident in Playboy's merchandise which has moved from predominantly adult male products (eg., car accessories) to women's fashion, make-up, jewellery and even home furnishings (see Appendix, Image 1).

Playboy makeup provides a particularly good example of Playboy's shift in marketing to young women and girls. The makeup is available at open-sell environments rather than beauty counters, which appeals to young girls beginning to experiment with makeup. The packaging is targeted at a younger age group, with bright pink packaging and tubes topped with 'cute' bunny ears (see Appendix, Image 2). Individual lines within the makeup collection are clearly targeted at girls. For example, the range includes a "kissing gloss"; lip gloss rather than lipstick being a product commonly marketed to girls. The

kissing gloss colour is also called "First Kiss". Other lines are called "Nymphette" (blush) and Sweet Chastity (eye shadow).

The Playboy brand is being marketed to young women and girls as 'cute', completely devoid of having any connection to the adult entertainment industry. This is reflected in a competition run in the June 2007 edition of *Girlfriend* magazine to win Playboy branded T-shirts. The competition wording was as follows: "Playboy is a collection of clothing and swimwear for the trend savvy, fashionable girl. So to keep up to date with the latest trends, we've got 10 Playboy prize packs to give away! ... Cute and innocent, cool and tough all at the same time, Playboy is one brand you should include in your wardrobe".

One of the main issues with the marketing of an adult entertainment brand to girls is that the brand now signifies different meanings to different people. For a girl wearing a T-shirt featuring a Playboy bunny the brand might be "cute and innocent" but to Playboy's traditional market, men, it has a very different meaning (eg., sexual availability).

Source 2: Music videos

Music video TV shows are broadcasted in the morning at weekends and are often viewed by children. The women that appear in many music videos are highly sexualised. This is particularly the case for back-up dancers, but is also evident in female performing artists. The choreography in many dance routines is sexual in nature and the attire that women wear is often revealing. The limited or complete lack of non-sexualised depictions of women in music videos reinforces the message that all women are sexual objects. Although music videos are stylised performances, children are not able to make these distinctions as clearly as adults.

Source 3: Magazines

There are a variety of magazines aimed at young girls. While magazine publishers may market a magazine to a particular age group and produce content which reflects this, there is a tendency for young girls to buy magazines pitched at older age groups. Statistics from the Roy Morgan Young Australian Survey, for example, indicate that in 2007, the number of *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* readers aged 6-13 was 225 000 and 190 000 respectively. Some of the content of magazines such as *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* are not appropriate for girls aged 6-13 (and some might argue are still inappropriate for even older girls). For example, the June 2007 edition of *Dolly* featured an article "What Every Girl Should Know About Kissing" which included a box titled "Pick Your Pash". One of the selections listed is the "Sexual Kiss" defined as "Kissing, licking or nipping another person on various parts of the body". The article also featured a photo of a male with facial hair dressed only in a pair of white Y-fronts, with the title, "Where to Kiss Him: Places Guys Love Kisses Most". The 'places' included his naked chest, collarbone and stomach. The number of young readers of magazines such as *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* suggests that many parents are either purchasing the magazines for their children or funding the purchases. With no classifications or recommended age guides, these magazines provide parents with little guidance on the age-appropriateness of their content.

Source 4: Fashion industry

There are many examples of clothing lines being marketed to young girls that do not appear to be age appropriate. For example, padded bra and brief sets and underwear that resembles adult's lingerie. There has also been a recent trend for T-shirts and underwear with slogans that have sexual connotations. Even babies clothes are featuring such slogans as "I'm a Tits Man" and "All Daddy Wanted was a Blowjob". There has also been a tendency for young girls' clothing to simply reflect smaller versions of adult women's styles, rather than styles suitable for girls of that age. There is also a worrying trend of using young girls to model adult women's clothing. In September last year a 12 year old girl was selected to be the face of the Gold Coast Fashion Week. Similarly, a 14 year old Polish model was set to walk the catwalk for the 2008 Australian Fashion Week but was cancelled after the organisers received criticism from the community and others in the fashion industry.

C) Examine strategies to prevent and/or reduce the sexualisation of children in the media and the effectiveness of different approaches in ameliorating its effects, including the role of school-based sexuality and reproductive health education and change in media and advertising regulation such as the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice and the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice.

Strategy 1: School-based education

Women's Health believes in the importance of school-based sexuality and reproductive health education for all children and that this education should be a standard part of the curriculum. Providing information and education for young girls regarding the physical changes and psychological adjustments of puberty is a key strategy to assist them to adapt to their social environment. In addition to sexuality and reproductive health education, Women's Health also encourages the teaching of media literacy to children so that they are able to recognise and resist marketing strategies that are directed at their age group. Women's Health has developed a Body Image educational program for girls in grade 8 to 9, which includes a media literacy component. This program has been delivered to several Brisbane high schools and has been well received.

Strategy 2: Parental education and responsibility

Parents should be provided with more information about the short and long term effects that viewing or buying sexualising and objectifying images and products have on children. Many parents are not fully aware of the potential damaging effects that such images and products can have on their child's development. It is also important that parents are encouraged and supported to exercise greater parental control regarding sexualising and objectifying images and products. In many cases, products are being either directly purchased by parents or funded by them. Parents are also ultimately responsible for what their children view on television, and/or the internet in their own homes. Parents often feel pressured by their children and, at times, even other parents to permit certain products and/or the viewing of certain TV shows. It is important that parents are provided with the knowledge and skills to effectively negotiate these parental challenges.

Strategy 3: Greater media regulation

It is important that relevant codes of practice such as the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice and the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice reflect and respond to the evidence surrounding the short and long term effects of sexualisation of children in the media. Other regulatory bodies, such as the Advertising Standards Board (ASB) also need to consider the effects of the sexualisation of children in the media. The ASB's decision to allow a Lee Jean's advertisement featuring a young woman posing in a sexual manner licking a lollipop (see Appendix, Image 3), indicates that they are may be out of touch with some community views. Parents, teachers and the general community need to feel that their own efforts to combat the sexualisation of children in the media are in fact being supported by regulatory bodies such as the ASB. Given the popularity of magazines among young girls, some form of classification or recommended reading age should be implemented. This would provide parents with clearer guidelines around the age appropriateness of these products.

Women's Health appreciates the opportunity to comment on this important issue. We look forward to hearing the outcome of the Senate Inquiry and any future developments.

Marg Moss
INTERIM MANAGER

APPENDIX



Image 1: Playboy branded Doona Cover
(http://www.groovee.com.au/category5_1.htm)



Image 2: Playboy makeup packaging.
http://blogs.news.com.au/news/entertainment/beautyaddict/index.php/newsentertainment/comments/playboy_beauty/



Image 3: Lee Jeans 2006/2007 Spring/Summer Campaign. Complaint made about the advertisement featured on a billboard dismissed by the Advertising Standards Board.

Images below also part of the Lee Jeans 2006/2007 Spring/Summer campaign. Uncertain as to the final extent of their use.

<http://www.adpunch.org/entry/controversial-lee-jeans-ad-declared-acceptable-by-the-board>





