

**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT,
COMMUNICATIONS, AND THE ARTS:
INQUIRY INTO THE SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN IN THE MEDIA.**

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I, the undersigned, am very concerned about the premature sexualisation of children and young teens by advertisers and commercial interests in the media and wider community. I am the Executive Director of the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program (CSAPP Inc.) in Victoria. I am also a Consultant for UNICEF in the area of child protection. In addition, I hold a PhD in the area of the prevention of child sexual abuse.

I have major concerns about the sexualisation of children in the media and have held these concerns for some time now. The sexualisation of children in the media occurs in different forums and in many different ways. For example, through the presentation of children in sexualised imagery in advertising, through the direct use of age-inappropriate sexualized content in magazines and merchandise marketed to children and young teens, as well as indirectly through the widespread use of overly sexualized adult imagery and content on television, radio, billboards and other forms of advertising to which children and young teens are involuntarily exposed on a regular basis.

As an expert in child sexual abuse prevention I am particularly concerned about the increasing tendency to present children as sexualised and sexually attractive beings in advertising. As highlighted in the groundbreaking and much needed reports by The Australia Institute ('Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of Children in Australia' by Emma Rush and Andrea La Nauze, 2006; 'Letting Children Be Children: Stopping the Sexualisation of Children in Australia' by Emma Rush and Andrea La Nauze, 2006), the presentation of children as sexual beings increases children's vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation. The presentation of children as sexual and sexually attractive beings (for example, dressing children in adult-like clothes and make-up, placing them in adult and provocative/suggestive poses, presenting children as having sexual desires for adults e.g., Renault television commercial) serves to normalise and legitimate the desires of sex offenders. The link between the viewing and collecting of child pornography and actual committing of sexual offences against children has been identified in research (see "RockSpider" by Petraitis and O'Connor, 1998) and the sexualisation of children in mainstream media therefore unnecessarily poses greater – unacceptable – risks to children.

I would be happy to present further evidence to the Senate Inquiry in person if that would be helpful.

There are countless examples of sexualised content in television programs, magazines, music video clips, advertising and other forms of media that children are inappropriately exposed to. A recent example includes Bert Newton's discussion of sex toys in the 5pm timeslot "Family Feud", a clear example of highly inappropriate sexualised content being televised during children's programming hours. The aforementioned articles by the Australia Institute provide numerous other examples. I have no doubt that other submissions to this Inquiry will furnish you with even more. However, I would like to provide you with a very pertinent example that had a very direct experience on the children in my care, as Executive Director of CSAPP Inc.

CSAPP Inc. runs a retreat for sexually abused children in Western Victoria. The purpose of the retreat is to provide children who have experienced sexual abuse and sexual exploitation with a safe and therapeutic environment where they can heal from their traumatic experiences. For a period of months a giant billboard was placed on the road into the main town near the retreat where we had to pass whenever we travelled into town. The billboard was advertising a brothel / available prostitutes and stated that there was "no need to buy flowers, dinner or chocolates for these women". The billboard was distasteful and sexist in its own right, but what was far worse was the fact that the sexually abused children attending the retreat had to view it numerous times a day as we drove in and out of town. The children commented on it and its presence most certainly undermined the therapeutic effect of the retreat. No-one was consulted regarding placement or content of the billboard – we certainly weren't and the detrimental effect of its content on our very vulnerable clients was most apparent.

I feel that the following actions should be undertaken as a matter of urgency to protect Australian children:

- Establish an enforceable Code of Practice for all areas of the media.
- The Code of Practice should explicitly set and enforce strict standards for the presentation of children and young people in the media. The portrayal of children as sexualised and sexually attractive beings must be outlawed completely.
- Establish an independent regulatory system to oversee all media exposure and advertising to children and young teens with a panel that includes interested members of the community and appropriately qualified childhood experts.
- Establish a single entry public complaints system for all areas of the media that has a genuine transparent process and provides tangible satisfactory responses / outcomes for complaints.
- Screen all billboards before they enter the public domain by an independent panel including appropriately qualified childhood experts. Consultation with local residents and other stakeholders should be undertaken before any billboards with sexual content are approved.
- Sexualised Music Video clips should only be shown outside children's viewing hours and they should be appropriately classified.

- Appropriate limitations should be placed on sexualised content and imagery in all magazines marketed to children and young teens.
- Regulation of sexualised merchandise – clothing, toys, etc - marketed and sold to children and young teens should be introduced as a matter of priority.
- All pornographic magazines should be kept covered and out of the eye level of children and young teens in newsagents, supermarkets, convenience stores, petrol stations and other retail outlets.
- Pornographic magazines with covers depicting adult women as children (hair in pigtails, school uniforms, etc) or with titles suggestive of under-age models (e.g., “school girls”, “teens”, “barely legal”) should be available only in specialist sex shops rather than in newsagents, petrol stations and other outlets frequented by children.
- Stricter control should be held on radio, TV programming, and all advertising at times when children and young teens are likely to be viewing. Where sexual content occurs during filming (e.g., Family Feud example cited previously), it should be edited out during post-production. Strong financial penalties should be incurred for non-compliance

I would be happy to expand on any of the above issues in person upon request.

I am most certainly aware of the pressure that members of the Senate Inquiry will be under from those with commercial and other interests not to adopt these recommendations. However, it is imperative that a clear and unambiguous stand is taken by the Executive of this country: the protection of our children outweighs all commercial and other interests.

I look forward to the positive outcomes arising from this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

SIGNED

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Families fume at Bert's smut

By Liam Houlihan September 09, 2007 04:00am

TV VETERAN Bert Newton has been labelled "dirty Berty" by family groups over smutty sex and vibrator jokes on his after-school game show.

Channel 9 was criticised by a watchdog this week for not responding properly to complaints about Newton's gutter humour on *Bert's Family Feud*.

The watchdog found a series of jokes about sex toys and references to nudists having sex did not breach its G-rating in the 5pm slot but that the channel had not responded to complaints.

But some viewers are still bothered that Newton might have turned from a family favourite into a dirty old man.

The controversy follows Newton's man-on-man pash with Rove McManus for charity and greeting Footy Show compere Garry Lyon on air with "Hello Garry, you old poof".

Family groups are unhappy that despite the outrage Nine used footage of the vibrator episode to promote the show online this week.

Under the heading "Contestant's 'buzz' word", the ninemsn website replays the footage.

"This makes me mad. There are a lot of unsavoury episodes in what should be a **children's timeslot**," Australian Family Association spokeswoman Angela Conway said. "We've lost the plot in understanding the developmental needs of children. We seem to assume they're zombies who don't pick up on anything."

Ms Conway said Newton had been no stranger to smutty innuendo over the years.

Viewers slammed the airing at 5pm of the incident in which the topic of sex toys was repeatedly brought up.

Newton asked a young female contestant to name a gift that was hard to return.

"This is a pretty filthy answer, but it's all I can think of and there's dirty people in your audience," the woman said. "So I'm going to go with vibrator."

Newton then made a series of vibrator jokes.

"I can hear a hum of some kind," he said before telling the woman to check her trousers.

Newton then asked the contestant's sister if she wanted "to get down and dirty" and, while hugging the woman, said: "I think you may have left your motor running."

The 5pm *Family Feud* shows are the last of the series, which has been axed by Nine.