



Submission to the

***Inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the
contemporary media environment***

The Australian Family Association (AFA)

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PRELIMINARY EXPLANATION OF TERMS AND INTENDED SCOPE OF SUBMISSION.

This submission will address the range of issues relevant to the Inquiry; further elaboration will then be offered about several issues; and appendices will address issues in regard to current advertising standards regulation.

Terms of Reference

The sexualisation of children in the contemporary media environment, including radio and television, children's magazines, other print and advertising material and the Internet.

In undertaking the inquiry, the committee, in particular:

- *examine the sources and beneficiaries of premature sexualisation of children in the media;*
- *review the evidence on the short- and long-term effects of viewing or buying sexualising and objectifying images and products and their influence on cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, sexuality, attitudes and beliefs; and*
- *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.*

AFA submission to be supplemental to other key reports :

The Australian Family Association (AFA) recommends the following important documents to the Senate Committee Inquiry for their nuanced, researched and broad ranging examination of the meaning of sexualisation and the sources and harm of sexualisation both for children and teenagers. The AFA submission will aim to supplement rather than re-present the discussion and analysis in these important papers. As such this submission will seek to reference and acknowledge these papers' analysis and discussion rather than repeat them. These papers are :

- **The American Psychological Association Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls¹ (APA Taskforce)** which is a broad ranging examination of sexualisation and the developmental harms caused by sexualisation to both children and adolescents. This report addresses the different ways in which sexualisation harms different age groups or developmental stages.
- **The Australia Institute Reports**, by Emma Rush and Andrea La Nauze, **Corporate Paedophilia** and **Letting Children Be Children²** which focuses on sexualisation of children (mainly pre teens or "tweens"). Also of use is the earlier Michael Flood and Clive Hamilton, **Youth and Pornography in Australia: Evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects** February 2003, The Australia Institute Discussion Paper 52. This report discusses some of the potential sexualizing

¹¹ American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. (2007). *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Retrieved from www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html

² Emma Rush and Andrea La Nauze, *Letting Children be Children: Stopping the sexualisation of children in Australia*, December 2006 The Australia Institute Discussion Paper 93; *Corporate Paedophilia: sexualisation of children in Australia*, October 2006 The Australia Institute Discussion Paper 90

impacts on boys of pornographic media. This discussion may be applicable to other sexualizing media and marketing directed at boys.

- **Women's Forum Australia's Report *Faking It***³, by Selena Ewing and edited by Melinda Tankard Reist, which focuses on sexualisation's impacts on children and adolescents through women's and girls magazines and also looks at underlying cultural and economic drivers of such sexualisation.

Terminology

- **Marketing** refers to the choices producers make about the types of merchandise or products they will manufacture and sell to the market and to strategies to tailor their production and promotion for maximum sales returns and profits. Advertising is just one part of marketing
- **Advertising** refers to specific attempts to attract consumers to specific products and brands and to sell those products.
- **Products** are goods and services, including television programs, magazines, books, music recordings or videos, cosmetic (eg waxing, plastic surgery), food. In modern marketing, the meaning of products has been expanded to include even celebrities. Modern celebrities are packaged as a character to be enjoyed, watched, listened to, and in straight economic language, to be consumed.
Products may also act as platforms for cross promotion of other products. Celebrities may advertise themselves, the program in which they perform, fashion or food and provide subject matter for other TV programs and magazines. Programs and magazines, are consumable products themselves but also provide platforms for other advertising for the market/ readership they target and construct.
- **Contemporary Media Environment.** As will be discussed below, the contemporary youth media environment may be becoming increasingly colonized by the pervasiveness and reach of modern marketing. Media is itself a product for commercial trade, whether in the form of TV programming, film, music and music video, magazines, books or online literature or audio visual material. There are still items of this media being produced and marketed primarily for their inherent value to young people and seeking to speak to young people's authentic needs. However substantial and possibly increasing amounts of youth media engagement involves engagement with deliberately constructed cross promotions of a diverse range of specific products or types of products, or a culture that supports the marketing of these products. Further study of the role of the internet in supporting the marketing colonisation of youth media would help advance understanding of the problem of sexualisation. As part of such study, evidence of and resistance to transformation of youth media into a marketing media driven by corporations rather than young people could be examined.
- **Youth culture.** The culture of childhood and adolescence may be being shaped more and more by marketing activities and a commercially dominated media. There has been in recent years a blurring of the boundaries between advertising and media and between media and other products and media and culture. Various sub-cultures' (eg goth, emo) emergence may reflect young people's resistance to the commercialisation of youth culture.
- **"Tweens" and "pre-teens".** This submission will use the term "tween" only for convenience and indicates at the outset that it does not regard it as useful terminology related to child development. Tweens is a term constructed by marketers to identify the increasingly lucrative market for commercial exploitation of children who are not yet teenagers but are older than "young children". Such children have been identified as being sufficiently aware of, influenced by and concerned with peer conformity and marketing and to be persuasive with parents about consumption decisions.

³ Selena Ewing and Melinda Tankard Reist, ed., *Faking it: the female image in young women's magazines*, 2007, Canberra: Women's Forum Australia

Increasingly, marketers have recognised the possible spread of this tween market and have variously identified its starting age as between 5 and 8 years of age. Marketers have used this language to make inferences about the alleged adolescent needs and behaviours of children. "Pre-teen has traditionally been used to reference children on the cusp of puberty (and adolescence) and going through a well understood developmental phase across a range of domains. Children have usually been considered "pre teen" if they were 10 to 12 years of age.

- **Children.** Children is a term that can be used to describe all young people below the age of majority or adulthood. Its use in this way is helpful and important to this Inquiry. The APA Taskforce Report and the WFA's *Faking It* report have considered the impacts of sexualisation on children and adolescents. Well established psychological theory and observation are increasingly supported by neurobiological studies. Adolescence, like childhood, is marked by developmental stages and limitations. The nature of these limitations and vulnerabilities are significant and will change as young people grow through adolescence and as they gain increasing maturity and competence across physical, emotional and cognitive domains. Adolescents are not simply less experienced adults capable of an adult response to media and marketing if given a little education. The need for the passage of time and maturation cannot be made redundant by education. As such, adolescents and younger children both need the care and guidance of adults, parents, community and society, to grow into healthy adults. Adolescents may be especially vulnerable to the psychologically sophisticated marketing strategies employed against them in recent years.

Both sexualisation of boys and girls will be considered

In most of these reports the focus is on the impacts and processes of harmful sexualisation especially for female children and adolescents. However there is some discussion of the ways in which sexualisation of boys can occur and the extent of the resultant harms. In particular, the Australia Institute's earlier work on the impact of pornography is included and recommended to the Committee because, in discussion of the impact of pornography on boys and teenagers, the authors can shed light on the potential harms of sexualisation of boys occurring from a range of different sources.

A sustained examination will reveal substantial marketing efforts focused on influencing the culture of childhood and adolescence, especially for females, and constructing anxieties and consumer demands focused around sexualising products. In any matter of gender or sexuality, there is always likely to be a flip side to such marketing. The Australian Family Association (AFA) believes that boys may suffer indirect sexualisation effects from the sexualisation of girls and that they may also suffer harm from sexualising influences aimed specifically at boys. Their development of healthy gender identity and sexuality is likely to be harmed. Boys' gendered identity and sexuality may become enmeshed in aggression and objectification of girls, women or even other people generally.

MAIN RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

- *examine the sources and beneficiaries of premature sexualisation of children in the media;*
- *review the evidence on the short- and long-term effects of viewing or buying sexualising and objectifying images and products and their influence on cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, sexuality, attitudes and beliefs; and*
- *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.*

RESEARCH ON MEDIA CONTENT IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLES' ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

A very solid body of research has found clear links between young people's exposure to violent media content and increased and persistent aggressiveness and violent attitudes and behaviours. As will be indicated below, the AFA believes that the role of some violent media in the sexualisation of boys warrants further study. Such violent media has included films, TV programming and animation.

A related and growing body of research is identifying a clear and stronger link between young people and adults' use of violent video gaming and increased aggressiveness and violence in attitudes and behaviours.⁴

Some studies have been carried out on the effects of young peoples' exposure to sexual content in TV programming. These studies, although limited, have pointed to links with such exposure and earlier sexual initiation in adolescents.⁵

Overall, such studies may indicate that media content can act on young people resulting in changes in attitude and behaviour that are not temporary. Many young people may believe, erroneously, that they are not changed or influenced by such media consumption.

Theories postulating a cathartic effect in regard to violent media have been addressed and found lacking evidentiary support. It has also been argued, coherently, that catharsis in this sense is not compatible with psychological and neurobiological understandings about the role of behaviour (media message consumption) and repetition in the development of habits, neural pathways and personality traits in humans.⁶

Numerous studies point to clear correlations between TV watching and body image disorders in girls and young teens.⁷ It may be reasonable to postulate strong links to the consumption of sexualised media and neurologically founded habits of self surveillance, self or other objectification and other sexualised behaviours and development of unhealthy or distorted gender identity.

SEXUALISATION

The American Psychological Association Taskforce **defined Sexualisation:**

as occurring when a person's value comes only from her/his sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics, and when a person is sexually

⁴ Victor C Strasburger, *Adolescents and the media: why don't paediatricians and parents "get it"?* MJA • Volume 183 Number 8 • 17 October 2005 http://www.youngmedia.org.au/mediachildren/10_02_bib_violence.htm lists research relating to violent content ranging from music lyrics through film to interactive video games.

⁵ Rebecca L. Collins, PhD*, Marc N. Elliott, PhD*, Sandra H. Berry, MA*, David E. Kanouse, PhD*, Dale Kunkel, PhD, Sarah B. Hunter, PhD* and Angela Miu, MS*; *Watching Sex on Television Predicts Adolescent Initiation of Sexual Behaviour*, PEDIATRICS Vol. 114 No. 3 September 2004, pp. e280-e289; Published online September 1, 2004; Sarah L. Ashby, MD, MS; Christine M. Arcari, PhD, MPH; M. Bruce Edmonson, MD, MPH *Television Viewing and Risk of Sexual Initiation by Young Adolescents*, Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2006;160:375-380 avail online at <http://archpedi.ama-assn.org>

⁶ C A Anderson, D A Gentile, K E Buckley, *Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents Theory, Research and Public Policy* 2007 Oxford

⁷ Victor Strasburger, *Adolescents and the media Why don't parents and paediatricians get it?* MJA Vol 183 Number 8 Oct 17 2005; WFA's Faking It report also discusses the impacts of magazines especially on young readers.

objectified..⁸

Sexualisation describes a disruption of healthy child and adolescent psychosexual and gender identity development which has significant consequences for their healthy and balanced development across a range of developmental domains. Psychosexual, emotional, cognitive and even physical development may be disrupted and distorted.

Girls are coached to identify femininity within a narrow band of behaviours and expression heavily focused on appearance, "sexiness" and intensely critical of perceived physical shortcomings. Boys may find that large proportions of media, games, music and advertising directed at them emphasise aggression as a key male trait as well as readiness to objectifying others, especially girls and women

Sexualised young people will tend to locate their own value in their body's sexual currency. Sexualising influences act to foster increased tendencies to objectify one's own body and others, seeing them as things or objects to use to obtain pleasure, acceptance or empowerment. The APA Taskforce identifies girls' *internalizing of observers' perspectives on their physical selves as a particularly damaging dimension of self objectification.*

Sexualisation thus tends to result in pre-occupation with one's body and appearance, with one's sexual currency and "sexiness". *Girls' ensuing self surveillance and constant re-evaluation of one's body and its sexual currency can become quite disabling, setting up cognitive interference over every other activity she does.*

Boys can be encouraged or incited to objectify girls and young women so as to achieve peer or social acceptance, or to feel empowered. Boys may learn to see this objectification as part of normal male sexuality. Boys and young men can also be encouraged to see their bodies or sexual organs as merely an object or means to achieve goals or emotional release, acceptance and empowerment. Both these aspects of objectification should be seen as evidence of sexualisation in boys

Sexualised young people may be more prone to suffering psychological difficulties and to underdevelopment in other areas. A substantial part of the epidemic, amongst young people, of anxiety, depression, eating disorders and self harming has been linked, in research, to sexualisation.⁹

Sexualisation, may lead to young people adopting a range of sexual behaviours, the meaning or consequences of which they may be unprepared to understand or handle.

Harms of Sexualisation

In all of these ways, sexualisation leads young people to see their own bodies and others as merely objects to be used for desired gains. Sexualisation inhibits integrated psychosexual development, makes authentic love and relationships, founded on interaction between whole persons, difficult to achieve and fosters unhappiness and psychological distress.

⁸ APA Taskforce Press Release Feb 19 2007

⁹ APA Taskforce on Sexualization Press Release Feb 19 2007

Sexualisation, disrupts and limits holistic and balanced development in children and teenagers.

Sexualisation, through the pre-occupation and cognitive interference of constant anxiety and self surveillance, may harm academic performance. The sexualised messages of media and marketing downplay and crowd out any valuing of broader cognitive development or non-sexualised life goals and aspirations. Wider life goals are affirmed if they can be tied into the need to be sexy and attractive. Research (see Ewing and APA Taskforce) has identifies ways in which sexualization may interfere with girls' physical activity and participation in sport because of fears of exposing bodily imperfections. Reduced participation in a range of other cognitive, creative and social activities important to balanced development may be discouraged if not in line with sexualization.

Normal child's or teenage activities including physically active games or sport, games of role play, imagination or competition may be displaced. Young girls may become concerned that such activities will damage their carefully cultivated appearance. Many girls dress routinely in clothes not suited to vigorous physical activity. Girls may spend disproportionate time on activities focused on appearance. Makeup or makeover games, dolls and games focused on shopping and appearance help to contribute to this.

Parents may have increasing difficulty sourcing practical clothes and footwear for girls that is designed to facilitate active or outdoor play, let alone be warm or comfortable. As children enter older childhood and early adolescence, parents may find the sourcing of age appropriate clothing increasingly difficult for girls. Most clothing for these ages starts to reference raunch culture. Rush and La Nauze discussed, at length, trends in clothing for tweens. In addition there has been reporting on the marketing of "sexy" underwear. Young women today will find it hard to source fashionable clothing for winter that is actually warm. A perusal of teenage girls' outfits at a Saturday morning's netball competition in winter will find most teenagers tense and cold in outfits designed for the celebrities of balmy Los Angeles rather than for ordinary active girls out on Melbourne winter mornings.

Sexualisation is not the normal healthy psychosexual development that takes place in subtle ways during the latency period of childhood and in more obvious ways through adolescence. Such development is normally gradual and in a healthy, balanced interplay with the general emotional, cognitive and physical development of the teenage years.

Part of sexualisation's impact, even modus operandi, is to force older sexuality onto younger ages (called "age compression"). Generally the destructiveness of this strategy is increased because it is a sexualized sexuality being imposed. Hence, pre-teens have been targeted with marketing aimed at turning their pre-teen sexuality into a teenage sexualized sexuality. Then the sexualized sexuality of teens and tweens is aimed at 4, 5 and 6 year olds. Whole wonderful periods of childhood are swallowed up by this process. Young adolescents are targeted for the imposition of late adolescent sexuality.

Our society is rapidly losing its awareness and accommodations to the different stages of child and adolescent development. With this loss goes also a loss of understanding about the needs of children and adolescents for guidance, care and protection especially in response to the various developmental limitations and vulnerabilities of different stages of that development. Young people need this care from their parents, from their community and from society.

Sexualisation, in the context of current market conditions, operates to leave young people with a pervasive anxiety about the acceptability or attractiveness of their body for the purposes of sexual involvements or power and also for general acceptance and likeability in their peer groups and society. Sexualisation allows marketers to cultivate vulnerability to marketing amongst young people. Perceptions of need are fostered for a range of products that will be used in attempt to guarantee peer acceptance, sexual attractiveness, to assuage anxiety and bolster one's value. The Ewing and Tankard Reist analysis of the way girls and young women's magazines work to keep their readership in thrall to the editors and the range of advertisers that populate their pages vital for understanding the reasons why sexualisation is profitable.

Behaviours of sexualisation

Teenagers caught up in sexualized behaviors may invest substantial amounts of time and other resources in bodily appearance and exhibit abnormal levels of anxiety and self criticism about their appearance and body shape. Sexualised teens may feel pressure to be sexually flirtatious or active and to engage in attempted relationships or interactions, sexual or other, characterized by self and other objectification.

Sexualised teens may tolerate coercive or drunken sexual involvements which increasingly and commonly feature in adolescent sexual experiences.¹⁰ Such teens may tolerate the demands of others, including those in the peer group to submit to or perform oral sex. Oral sex has "emerged as a common practice", with 45% of students in Years 10, 11 and 12 having engaged in it, according to a national survey in 2002 by La Trobe University. Many adolescent girls may be unable to report any personal benefit from such practice beyond peer group acceptance and avoidance of pejorative labels such as "frigid".¹¹ They may pursue or accept sexual contact as a means to achieve power, secure group belonging or emotional release.

Such behaviour puts young people at risk of psychological and physical harms. Experts identify depression, anxiety, self harm and other problems as being increasingly prevalent amongst teenagers. In addition, the incidence of STIs has increased dramatically in young people. One in ten sexually active teenagers now has an STI. Chlamydia is the most common infection amongst young people although Gonorrhoea, Herpes and other STIs are also contracted by young people. *The Age* reported last year that "the number of notifications for chlamydia across Australia has more than tripled between 1999 and 2006. And young people aged 15 to 24 suffer the highest rates, accounting for more than 60 per cent of all chlamydia notifications so far this year".¹² Such infections can have significant repercussions for the future fertility of young people and some may negatively impact their long term quality of life and capacity to form satisfying, lasting relationships.

¹⁰ *The Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young Victorians 2005*

¹¹ Oral sex practices amongst teenagers appear to be on the increase in Australia as well as other countries such as the US. One study of adolescents who engaged only in oral sex found that the girls were less likely to report experiencing pleasure, feeling good about themselves, and having their relationship become better as a result of sex.- *Pediatrics* Vol. 119 No. 2 February 2007, pp. 229-236 (doi:10.1542/peds.2006-1727); SBS' *Insight* discussed teen sexuality in a program during 2007. Oral sex practices were discussed but female participants were not able to identify reasons for the practice beyond peer group pressure or a desire to be known as proficient. . In that program some of the boys also indicated strong peer group pressure to participate in oral sex.; "Love and Teen Pregnancy" *Post* June 16 2007 reporting remarks of Dr Rachael Skinner.

¹² 'Highest rate ever of teenage STDs' *Age* September 26, 2007 -reporting on an Adolescent Health Forum at Sydney University.

Children's preoccupation with bodily appearance and conformity with certain kinds of dress and behavior, established by marketing and advertising and peer group norms can be an indicator of sexualisation. Many children learn to adopt exaggerated adolescent styles of behavior as well as behaviors that have sexual meanings, modeled on the sexualized behavior of older people such as siblings, music performers, and to learn pop music lyrics that have sexual meanings in them.

Sexualisation in children may lead to earlier sexual initiation. Research is needed on this issue. Studies of teenage sexual initiation show a clear trend recently for earlier sexual initiation with recent findings of the median age now 16years. Research indicates that the psychological and physical risks of teen sexual involvements increase for younger ages.¹³ Such trends may be at least partially linked to sexualisation both in childhood and in early adolescence.

Tween magazines engage in the sexualisation of children through concentrating on issues of beauty, fashion, celebrity and "crushes", and encouraging girls to take an interest in these issues from a very young age¹⁴. Stereotypes of "the feminine ideal image" are engendered.¹⁵

Also, the repeated emphasis on boy-girl relationships encourages young girls to view men only as sexual objects, potential partners, or "crushes". This has the effect of implicitly encouraging the early involvement by young girls in such relationships, and so increases the likelihood of early sexual activity. It also encourages girls to respond positively to sexual compliments and advances from a young age.

Sexualisation may be occurring even in very young children. Young children as young as 4 or 5 years of age may be susceptible to sexualizing modeling of older children or media characters and toys. Many young children are coached to present themselves in coquettish ways or to use sexy dance moves. Boys may be coached to be aggressive towards girls and to focus on the conformity or otherwise of girls appearances to the sexualized norm.

Sexualisation of children, including young children, and early adolescents may put them at greater risk of sexual predation.

Anecdotal reports of problem sexualized behaviors amongst pre-school or kindergarten and junior primary ages have ranged from harassing of other children, demanding or attempting to scrutinise their underwear, or pronouncing on whether they are sexy or not, through to covert sexual behaviors characterized by coercion, or attempted penetration.

Whilst most problem sexual behaviour is thought to be caused by prior abuse or by parental or familial problems, a growing number of cases have been linked to history of inappropriate exposure to sexualizing media or other influences.¹⁶

¹³ *The Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young Victorians*, A collaborative project between Family Planning Victoria, Royal Women's Hospital, Centre For Adolescent Health

¹⁴ *Rush and La Nauze*, pp15-17.

¹⁵ *Rush and La Nauze* pp16-17.

¹⁶ Patrick Goodenough *Online Porn Driving Sexually Aggressive Children* *CNSNews.com* November 26, 2003 reporting study conducted by the Child at Risk Assessment Unit, Canberra Hospital finding a marked rise in cases of very problematic aggressive sexual behaviour in young children linked in 90% of cases to internet porn exposure in the context of chaotic households and very poor parenting.. Incidents of sexual assaults and sexualised behaviours in young children

Other subtle harms of sexualisation

The cultural changes of childhood have been cast as a fact of life and a natural feature of 21st century socio-economic realities. However, such argument fails to address the very significant ways in which child development is hindered.

Ordinary young girls caught up in this culture, leave dolls behind before they have even started to play with them. A range of dolls to choose from is no longer possible as all girls must have the pouty, sexualised Bratz dolls so that one can play at being like a sexualised pop star or Paris Hilton. Young girls have been deterred from delighting in pretty dresses and ribbons because the Bratz culture had previously insisted on clothes being tarty, brief and drably coloured.

Interestingly, Bratz dolls and culture has apparently just recently undergone a thorough renovation and makeover. At least on the website, pretty dresses and less tarty looks are now acceptable again. The dolls appear to be less ugly and aggressive and perhaps a little softer and more child like. The raunch references seem to be disappearing. Emphasis on fashion, shopping and makeovers still dominates. The sexualised Baby Bratz have lost their sexualised image. Has Bratz succumbed, in part, to consumer and political anger at their previous manipulations of children's culture?

Longstanding traditional childhood activities such as imaginative outdoor play or basic role play games like "House" are scorned precisely at the moment when children should be discovering the maturity and confidence to play beyond the tight confines of their homes. Under the sexualising culture of childhood today, childhood has become a very different and constrained experience to that of other 20th century generations including the Gen X and Y parents of today.

The sexualisation culture fosters, jaded boredom and cynicism in young girls and boys together with suppression of intellectual and imaginative life. Today's children largely play pre-scripted games on or off line. For girls, games usually revolve around enhancement of image and consumption of products. Endless variations on the imitation of a Pop star or Paris Hilton kind of lifestyle are rehearsed. In the Bratz range, girls can play at being part of the pooch-owning-set presumably in imitation of Hilton and the like. They can purchase a multitude of glitzy accessories for their pooches and themselves. Then they can return to focus on their own outfits, hair and makeup makeovers. The aim is to look like a star and according to the standards of Bratz "it takes time to look this good" (opening page of the website).

Today's girls and young women habitually suppress evidence of their intellectual life and imagination through the inhibition and stunting of verbal expression and language. Copying Paris Hilton's "like" and "whatever" for every second word in a sentence may seem funny the first time. But when it becomes an habitual feature of every effort at communication it begins to look tragic. Many young girls cultivate habits of speech that make it difficult for listeners to hear what they are saying. Many young girls have been subtly encouraged to cultivate lisps apparently because lisps are now "sexy". Trends

have been reported to the author from parents and some medical practitioners. In addition child protection and development experts such as Joe Tucci of the Childhood Foundation have reported cases. In *Pornography, abuse blamed for sexually problematic children* May 2, 2008 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/05/02/2233341.htm> Susan Browning reports on a new project in Hobart to tackle a marked rise in problem sexual behaviours and links to internet or other pornography or sexual content exposure and poor parenting and other factors

such as these indicate that girls are dumbing themselves down and self-censoring their individual expression to conform to narrow sexualised models held out as acceptable in youth culture. Porn stars and girls whose only value lies in their body's sexual commodification are not expected to have vibrant intellectual or imaginative lives. Indeed, expression of such a life is increasingly discouraged as anathema to such cultural norms.

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EXPOSED TO SEXUALISING MEDIA AND MARKETING

Modes of sexualisation include

- marketing aimed directly at children and teenagers.
- through play with certain toys or through online games or other games,
- exposure to marketing, including advertising and television programming directed primarily at adults.
- exposure to marketing ostensibly aimed at adults but probably deliberately also or primarily aimed at adolescent markets

Highly suggestive depictions of sexual activity and behaviour ranging from sexual intercourse, arousal, through to highly suggestive "come on" or flirting behaviour, or other depictions normalising public or casual sexual interaction and sexual objectification have all created concern. Other sexualising content relates to age compression marketing involving games, fashion, music and toys for example.

Older adolescents will generally be vulnerable to sexualising influences if such content is used in public advertising.

Whether something is sexualising for a child will depend, in part, on whether there is some normal, unsexualised meaning or narrative that they can readily apply to such advertising. In the past advertisers, exercising more restraint and creativity delivered advertising content with layers of meaning so that their public advertising could be accessed by all ages safely with the sexual joke delivered discreetly to adults or older adolescents.

Advertising aimed at adults and adolescents with strongly sexualised messages and depictions:

- Recently a television ad for Kotex' U tampons featured a beaver as a symbol of a girl's vagina. Clearly, the ad was American, but in the age of the internet, the meaning of the symbolism soon got round. One part of the ad involved men ogling the woman's beaver. By implication they were depicted as symbolically ogling her vagina in public. The strength of this objectifying message and its transgression of accepted norms concerning sexual display and public nudity was not a concern to the ASB who dismissed complaints about it. How would such an advertisement impact adolescent girls and boys who were all in the target audiences for these ads? Other advertisements with strong sexualised content that have raised community concern include the Nandos Pole Dancing Ad, the Lynx Ads.

Examples of "adult targeted" sexualised marketing (as claimed by advertisers or marketers) affecting children or adolescents includes :

- Outdoor advertising or broadcasted advertising at time or during programming when children and adolescents are likely to be part of the audience.
- porn and escort services advertising on late evening television programming. That this audience is typically composed, at least in significant part, by older adolescent and young adult audiences is

clear from the programs broadcasters schedule at this time. *Buffy, Angel, Nikita, Alias, Stargate*, repeats of *Heroes* and *Lost*, *Big Brother* provide examples of adolescent targeted programming.. The real motivations of such marketers goes unexamined and unaddressed at the ASB or with the broadcasters.

- Programming of adult focused situation comedies such as *Two and Half Men*, *How I met Your Mother* containing frequent sexual references and adult sexual themes during family viewing time. In the early evening, it is very likely that children will be in the audience and will struggle to make sense of much of the content unless they are sexualised. Recent content included matter of fact discussion of the father's and uncle's sexual exploits and relationships by the 12 year old boy. One recent episode finished with the boy calling out from the bathroom in embarrassment. He had taken what he thought were his dad's vitamin pills but were in fact viagra. The show ended with grandmother exiting scene to fetch a second birthday hat. Only a few short years ago, broadcasters would not have scheduled this type of program before 8.30pm.

Examples of adolescent-targeted sexualised marketing also knowingly reaching teens or children (tweens) in the audience with either deliberate marketing intent or apparent reckless disregard for the consequences:

- Soft porn Zoo magazine is advertised during programs like *Home and Away* that is marketed heavily to teenage and tween audiences (through magazines such as *Total Girl* and *Girlfriend*).
- The marketing of teenage programs such as *The OC* with adult themes and significant sexual content to children through tween magazines. *The OC* featured regular highly suggestive depictions of teen sexual activity and other sexualising content. Programmed for the 8:30pm timeslot on channel 10 between 2004 and 2007 and classified M rating for sexual content and drug references, the program was prominently advertised in the children's magazine *Total Girl*, whose target audience is 8 to 11-year-old girls. It was not surprising that it attracted strong ratings among children.

Examples of increased "age compression" sexualising strategies with marketing to teenagers and children:

- Media directed at teens and tweens has seen a shift to increased sexual and sexualising content. Younger teens are being more regularly exposed to greater emphasis on and strengthening of sexual content. Programs like *Home and Away* or magazines like *Girlfriend* claim that young people desire this level and type of content. The sexualised culture in which they are growing up would certainly create heightened interest but such media do have the capacity to provide balance and even a genuine alternative to the sexualised culture. There is no doubt that such media do sometimes handle issues well and helpfully by contemporary standards. That they fail to do so as a general rule and that they market this programming heavily at children undermines their claims to responsibility.
- Celebrity dolls and sexualisation of play. The image of Barbie has become more sexualised and is now tied into a magazine with sexualising content aimed at "tweens" (see Rush and La Nauze). The Bratz teenagers dolls have been pre-defined as sexy and provocative (until very recent changes) and as focussed on fashion, shopping, makeup, appearance and pop star performances. With their sexualised teen concerns and pre-occupations they are marketed to tween aged girls. These girls will practice the sexualised teen scripts laid down by Bratz, passion for fashion,

makeovers, taking "time to look this good". The dolls link into a magazine (once the domain of teenagers), DVDs a TV show, websites and music.

- *Home and Away's* content has shifted markedly towards emphasis and pre-occupation with sexual issues, including pole dancing, a woman's seduction of her teenage daughters' boyfriend and the alleged normality of teen sexual involvements and aggressive teenage sexuality. On a number of occasions in recent years, parents or other leadership characters with religious faith or a tendency to "strictness" or "outdated values" have been implicitly criticised as being unbalanced. One recent story line involved a young Christian girl being gently disabused of her ridiculously outdated views about teenage sexual activity by her "wiser" friend who has by now a string of teenage partners with little consequence. To support the story line's depiction, the Home and Away website directs readers to *Girlfriend*.
- Teen magazines and sexualization, of themselves and in context of broader marketing engage in age compression sexualization strategies for commercial gain. There on p.154 Nov 2007 of *Girlfriend*, a 12 year old is advised on how to manipulate her strict parents who don't like the idea of boyfriends yet. In the same issue, p.147(?), the readers- are they 12 or 15 or 17?- are told that "19% of you have had sexual intercourse" without any discussion about which age range the statistics relate to or any effort to draw the readers attention to the other 81%. The statement fails to acknowledge the likely and substantial dysfunction behind such statistics particularly in younger age groups. Then *Girlfriend* goes on to claim that "62% of you feel you know enough about sex" but on the same page, claim that "78% of you want more info about sex". *Girlfriend*, who markets itself as a responsible and trustworthy source of information to young people, also tells its readers that "89% are confident enough to say no to sex" despite major studies in Australia revealing a strong likelihood of teenage sexual involvements being characterised by regret, intoxication or coercion.¹⁷ *Girlfriend* also tells its readers "47% consider the sex lives of celebs to be entertaining". And then *Girlfriend* wants to claim that they care about the dangers of sexualisation! Of course, other teen magazines are using similar sexualisation formulas for readership growth.
- *Girlfriend*, and other magazines such as *Dolly* have presented some excellent articles to counteract the sexualising messages of media. Some improved representations of body shape diversity may help lessen the impact of the general heavy emphasis on appearance. But as a general rule, any good work that is done is undone, apparently by the commercial imperative to run sexualising content and advertising. Ewing and Tankard Reist presented a thorough analysis of the commercial strategies underlying teen and young women's magazines' focus on sexual content, body shape, facial appearance, dress and sexy behaviour. Whilst magazines moderate the degree of explicitness and controversy in their sexualising content depending on age of readership, and vary the mix of apparently responsible and helpful articles and editorials, the fundamental approach is the same. Last year, teen magazines published a plethora of articles about the evils of solariums following the death of a young woman in Melbourne. At the same time, these magazines were full of articles and advertisements of cosmetic tanning products as if to say: 'solariums are the dangerous quick fix but these products are the right way to get the tan that is now essential'. The tans are essential as is extensive depilation, the right hair, clothes and sexy image. In November's

¹⁷ A Smith, C Rissel, J Richters, A Grulich, R de Visser *Sex in Australia Summary findings of the Australian Study of Health and Relationships,* Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS), La Trobe University, April 2003.

addition of *Dolly* last year, a number of school aged photos of celebrities were presented to guarantee that no matter how unacceptable and "dorky" you might think you are, you can be fixed.

- Reality television's rise in popularity with both audiences and broadcaster may have more to do with the dynamics of commercially harnessed sexualisation than low costs of production. Young people in particular seemed to be strongly attracted to this genre, perhaps because it feeds their need to test and explore ideas and approaches to the construction of acceptable images. Idol and other programs have sent strong messages about body size and shape, facial appearance and dress and the ubiquitous need for "sexiness". Emphasis is on witnessing image reconstructions and makeovers or witnessing "real-life -like" scenarios and their resolution. Much the same dynamic is involved when readers present their stories or questions for advice in magazines. Like readers' approach to magazines, reality TV audiences may be constantly re-evaluating themselves against the magazines'/programs' content and messages. Of course, such programming is also marketed heavily to teenagers and also to tweens.

Boys' Exposure To Sexualising Media And Marketing

Adolescent boys are aggressively targeted with advertising, ostensibly aimed at adults, for escort services and soft porn downloads as well as "men's" magazine *Zoo* during television programming they are more likely to watch.

Boys may also be exposed to sexualizing influences in marketing and media that are directed at boys and young men. They may also be sexualized indirectly as a result of sexualisation of girls.

Boys, children and adolescent, may be the target of sexualising influences via some toys, through music industry products, including music lyrics, the marketing of artists' image and lifestyles, through video and other graphic accompaniments to music. Harmful sexualisation risks may be posed in boys internet use, electronic gaming and other contemporary digital media and communication developments. Boys are also exposed to direct and indirect sexualisation risks through film and television programming that are marketed to them.

Boys' Sexualisation through electronic games and music industry products.

Marketing to male children and teens can involve the marketing of games, music and films that focus on the cultivation of hostility or indifference to women and girls and aggression and skills in the efficient and effective infliction of violence.

Games such as *Grand Theft Auto* are very popular amongst adolescent males. In these games, players implicitly take on the personas of "hypermale" lead characters. Harsh and randomly aggressive treatment of women is often enacted in these games. Many of these games include female characters who are nearly always also hypersexualised with exaggerated body shapes borrowed from the distorted forms of pornography. They are often depicted as in the style of "femme fatale" or as ruthless enemies. There is no doubt that media and literature has always incorporated stories of treacherous women, "femme fatales" and female enemies. The Gaming industry has generally opted to exaggerate these types and create stronger sexualisation of characters.

The music industry markets rap, and other styles of music heavily to boy children and teenagers. Music genres popular with boys are replete with examples of lyrics again expressing hostility and indifference to women and girls. Music videos frequently portray images of aggressive, voyeuristic, even menacing men. The men are always well clothed. In contrast, the women of this music world

are frequently minimally clothed with figure revealing outfits or in lingerie. These women are depicted as being sexually available, constantly sexually aroused and content to feature as background or writhe in accompaniment to enhance the male character's status. There are often intimations of coercion and violence in these music videos. Young boys are inculcated into this world with milder depictions and lyrics. They graduate during the adolescent years to the explicit violence and sex lyrics notoriously present in popular genres.

Other areas of Boys' and Girls' Sexualisation Via Internet, Gaming and Music

Research here and overseas points to the growing exposure of male boys and adolescents to video and online pornography as problematic. A number of researchers assert that boys' education in sexuality and relationships is now primarily via online porn or other porn sources such as magazines or illegally obtained DVDs.

The Australia Institute's previously published important reports on boys' and girls' high exposure to online or video pornography and discussion of some of the harms of this exposure is relevant here.¹⁸ Since boys' exposure was typically much higher and more extensive, the authors examined the kinds of harms to healthy male psycho-sexual development risked by such exposure. The authors found that in middle to late adolescence, beliefs about the normality of boys' consumption of pornography were common. For boys in this age range, 16-17 year olds, the researchers found that 73% reported consumption of pornographic videos with more than a fifth watching once a month.

Adolescent boys viewing online pornography was also considered normal although the evidence in 2003 indicated that much of the exposure to this kind of pornography was accidental. 38% of boys reported deliberate use of the internet for pornography consumption according to this 2003 study and the authors noted that at that time only a third of homes were connected to the internet.

Since 2003, the number of homes with internet connection has climbed. In 2005, it was estimated that nine out of ten homes had internet connection with some upper income homes having more than one¹⁹. Broadband internet connection has grown and download speeds have increased.

Access and exposure continue to be a problematic aspect of teenage internet use. Researchers in the US have highlighted the need "to restrict the use of aggressive and deceptive tactics" used to "**market pornography online**"(AFA's emphasis)²⁰ New Hampshire researchers found that large numbers of young people were confronted with pornographic images accidentally during straightforward internet use, social networking and file sharing.

The AFA has for some time characterised much of the activities of online "adult retailers" or pornographers who use strategies to target youth, especially boys, as aggressive and unethical marketing and sexual solicitation and exploitation.

¹⁸ Michael Flood and Clive Hamilton, *Youth and Pornography in Australia: Evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects* February 2003, The Australia Institute Discussion Paper 52

¹⁹ kidsonline@home Internet Use in Australian Homes, 2005 Australian Broadcasting Authority (ACMA) and Net Alert, SYdney

²⁰ Children viewing unsought net porn February 06, 2007 <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,21177249-7582,00.html>, reporting the findings and conclusions of researchers into access and exposure of 16-17 year olds in New Hampshire published in Journal of Pediatrics

It seems reasonable to conclude that many online pornographers see clear market advantages in the targeting of boys. Perhaps they too have taken on board recent research on brain development in the teenage years. The adult structure of a young man's brain may be adversely influenced by exposure to online porn so that the neurobiology of his psychosexuality may be trained and oriented to porn and the objectification of women. Perhaps, like tobacco, if boys are hooked on porn early they will become a permanent part of pornographer's markets into the future.²¹ A sizeable minority of older adolescent boys consume online or DVD pornography regularly. Encouragement of the use of credit cards in later adolescence will help ensure a growing stream of returns. Soft porn (and possibly illegally obtained hard porn) phone downloads can easily be purchased by young people with their phone accounts and it appears that a roaring trade is taking place..

Flood and Hamilton summarise the main types of pornography available on video (or DVD) and online. It is easy to access a range of pornography that would be refused classification in Australia because of its violent, coercive themes. They also conclude that the low accessibility of child pornography is unique. Recent police operations and arrests in Australia and overseas highlighted the typical secrecy and technological sophistication of online child pornographers who use encryptions and veiling to hide their wares from anyone outside of a proven inner paedophile circle.

Animated Transgressive Pornification of Children's and Teenage Cartoon Characters

Nonetheless, a different kind of pornography escapes scrutiny and also possibly regulation or filtering strategies. The growth in easily accessed animated pornography sites should raise concerns. The sub genre focused on children's cartoon characters may be attracting children or adolescents or may be posing accidental exposure risks. If a simple image search for a popular cartoon character is entered into Google, a range of pornographic subversive versions of the character appear in the listed search results. Hence an image search for "Atomic Betty", a popular pre-teen cartoon character, during mid April, resulted in a porn site being listed on the third page of results. Other porn sites cropped up on further results pages.

Such animated porn sites frequently draw female characters in explicit sexual poses with shocked or distressed expressions on their faces. With characters like Atomic Betty, some sites will mix up pictures of the character as prepubescent, pubescent or mature. Nude pictures with extensive graphic detail of a prepubescent and innocent Betty may sit next to other images of Betty as prepubescent or pubescent and engaged in sexual acts or even with quite womanly images. Thus it would seem that there is extensive child porn images of an animated kind that are readily accessible to anyone including children.

Animated porn also seems to focus on images of incest, and marital infidelity. It is easy to find explicit pictures of well known characters such as the Simpsons in various combinations and permutations of sexual congress. Images of Marge with Bart, or Marge, Bart and Lisa, Lisa and Bart, Lisa and Grandpa, Lisa and Homer, are all available and even Maggie the baby is shown being sexually abused. Pornographers apparently relish giving this treatment to other popular animation families such as the Jetsons. Flintstones and Incredibles.

²¹ Teenagers who fall in to a pattern of regular heavy drinking have been found to be more prone to developing alcohol addiction and also brain damage when compared to those who commenced drinking at later ages.

Studies are needed on the extent of child and adolescent exposure to this kind of content as well as the harm this content does. In this kind of pornography, viewers see recognisable husbands and wives, parents and children engaged in highly transgressive and illegal and radically objectifying sexual involvements. In most ordinary DVD porn, the characters are not generally recognisable characters from other genres and stories.

A recent upsurge in problem sexual behaviours in young children that involve simulated sex or attempted penetration have concerned and troubled some child health workers.²² As stated earlier, a number of experts believe there is a growing problem of problem sexualised behaviours and have linked it to online porn exposure. may have contributed to the sexualised behaviours. This animated porn may be found to be a contributor.

Mobile phone industry marketing

Mobile phone download companies target adolescents in their marketing and advertising. They are encouraged to purchase image files, animations, ring tones and other downloads. They are clearly being targeted with soft porn download marketing. They are also targeted with other text based services such as numerological analysis. Such marketing has only intensified in recent years suggesting good profit prospects.

Celebrity and Sexualisation

For many young women and girls the predominant modelling of female sexual attractiveness is sourced primarily from pornographic and raunch culture with celebrities like Paris Hilton or music artists. Women in the music industry may feel increased pressure today to adopt raunchy images and acts. Susy Quatro has commented on this pressure in the media and most female pop performers do seem to adopt sexualised images in performance.

Avril Lavigne's trademark skater-image is well known to a huge fan base including many young pre teen girls. She has performed generally in jeans and t-shirts or singlet tops. Her performances have been characterised by a physicality that is athletic, comedic and empowered rather than overtly sexualised. In the sexualised world of modern music, many young people may have found her image and performance refreshing. However her recent hit "Hot" marks a sudden change of this image. Suddenly, she appears in a vamped up video dressed briefly in the style of burlesque or sadomasochistic dominatrix with riding crop. The dance moves have changed radically too, with the physicality suddenly sexualised and constrained. Many young fans have expressed disappointment on website blogs and some have worried that she has fallen for the MTV pressure on women artists.

Delta Goodrem also recently appeared to adopt a new "sexier" image. The transformation of Nikki Webster from wholesome favourite with young girls to sultry embodiment of radical sexualisation in men's magazines was a particularly tragic example of this pressure. The transformation seemed to necessitated by our culture's intolerance of normal development or unsexualised childhood.

Since 6am-10am on Saturdays is recognised as a peak viewing period for children, all programming broadcast between those times must have a classification of G (General viewing) P (Preschooler viewing) or C (Children's viewing). However the content of music video programs at these times tends

²² Conversations with a child health worker

to include highly sexualised material. *Video Hits* is one such program, airing on the Ten network, between 8:30am and midday on Saturdays, and between 9am and midday on Sundays.

On Saturday 29 March, *Video Hits First*, which screens between 8:30am and 10am, featured music videos for the songs *Wow* by Australian artists Kylie Minogue, and *Work* by American artist Kelly Rowland.²³ Both of these songs contain sexualised lyrics, and are accompanied by similarly sexualised videos. *Work*, for example, contains such explicit lyrics as:

*Wanna see me lose my breath and wanna hear me moan
Better be ready, we'll be able when we get alone
You was talkin' confident upon the telephone
So you gotta put it in when we get it on*

The accompanying video comprises fast-cut sequences of the singer wearing various revealing outfits, and in sexually suggestive poses, including writhing around a neon pole. The combination of tight-fitting clothing and silhouette lighting create the impression of nakedness.

While the video for the Minogue song is less explicitly sexual, it contains many similar elements, including tight-fitting costumes, and an emphasis on the silhouetted body of the performer, who also appears to engage in pole dancing. The lyrical content is also less explicit, though it still focuses heavily on physical – and implicitly sexual – attraction:

*The way you walk, the rhythm when you're dancing
Every inch of you spells out desire
You're such a rush, the rush is never ending*

Such music programming is scheduled for a peak viewing period for children.

Gangsta Rap/ Hip Hop genres are marketed strongly to male children via clothing fashions, children's TV Programs in which male characters are often shown dressed in the baggy gangsta style. Since its inception, some rap artists, including the first, have chosen to use the form for non-violent and more positive expression but the record industry has been described as less than enthusiastic about promoting it. More profits are apparently to be had in the promotion of lyrics dripping with violence, menace and misogyny. Such themes and the responsible artists are glamourised by the music industry. The music industry targets older boys and teens directly. Film maker Byron Hurt who has just released a film *Beyond Beats and Rhymes* seeks to challenge the violence and misogyny that has been cultivated and promoted heavily in the industry. He and others describe the way in which this music cultivates a distorted gender identity of hyper masculinity encompassing menacing aggressiveness and the routine contempt or even hatred for and use of women as sexual objects, with no room for sensitivity, gentleness or vulnerability.²⁴ Harassment and sexual violence against women are said to be normalized and matter of fact in the music of Eminem's and other rap artists. Also relished are themes of violence and gun use and hatred and violence towards same sex attracted people.

²³ See Video Hits playlist, <http://videohits.com.au/playlists-saturday-march-29.htm>

²⁴ Kurt Barling *The Hip Hop Backlash* 21-02-08

http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2008/01/15/kurt_hiphop_feature.shtml; John McWhorter *Rap Only Ruins* August 10, 2003 http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/_nypost-rap_only_ruins.htm

YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE OF MODERN MEDIA AND MARKETING AS CULTURE

The complexity of modern youth marketing and its role in a sexualised culture and media

- Traditional advertising formats in which messages and depictions are clearly identified as advertising- billboards, magazine, audio and audio visual advertising.
- Embedded advertising-for example in magazines, the editorial or reporting content tends to support the objectives of the advertising or even to promote the advertiser products.
- Embedded marketing of ideas, cultural norms, fashions that support marketing objectives of advertisers
- Cross promotion across industries or products, often carried on magazine formats and by celebrities and music performers.

The cultivation of anxiety and dependence on products and services, including the advice of teen and pre teen magazines, and the harnessing of young people's growing spending power have proven to be lucrative areas of commercial activity.

Increasingly, young people's media experiences might be characterised as a complex interplay of marketing and advertising that uses sexualisation as an organisational force. Sexualisation may be acting as a thematic device delivering coherence to various corporation's efforts to maximise sales and profits across a diverse range of products and services.

Sexualisation can take place through peer group pressure. Many parents work hard to limit their children's and teenagers' exposure to sexualising influences in media and marketing. Of course, it is not possible to reduce this exposure, given the current regulatory failures, let alone to zero.

Marketers have also successfully exploited and contributed to the weakening of parental roles and confidence so as to profit from pester power or young people and new willingness of parents to tolerate sexualisation.

Young people's experience of marketing as culture

Young people experience sexualisation influences as part of specific marketing and advertising targeted at them or at adults. Young people also experience sexualisation more broadly as the current culture of childhood and adolescence. Films, television programming and literature may use sexualisation themes to appear relevant to or a part of this culture and the marketing realities young people experience.

Factors contributing to the rise of sexualisation as a marketing strategy

Sexualisation promoted in marketing and media is likely to be identified as a precise and heavily influential cultural phenomenon arising in the years around the turn of the 21st century. Other factors that may have a role include the development of computing technology, electronic games and the internet and the very processes or modes of action of such technology may be helping to change how young people see the world and each other, and how they behave. Social networking has emerged as potentially very influential in shaping youth culture. Other changes likely to be significant include the rapid expansion of urban environments and the unprecedented dominance of the car in ordinary life and urban environments.

This phenomenon of sexualisation is likely to be related to the adoption of self regulatory schemes within the context of globalising capitalism and concentration of economic power in a narrowing range of corporations.

Growing cross ownership of diverse media and marketing enterprises is also a growing feature of this landscape.

It may be no coincidence that sexualisation has become a serious challenge given that pornography's presence and accessibility in the culture has increased dramatically in the last decade due the development of the commercial capacity of the internet. Raunch culture and the sexualisation of young people may represent an encroachment of pornification into adolescence and childhood. Current standards of "sexiness" and attractiveness equate closely to the standards of pornography which in turn has little to do with the typical shape and appearance of female maturity.²⁵

Pornified standards of female beauty/ attractiveness/ sexiness (all equated) are quite different to those of previous times. Sexiness in contemporary youth culture equates to having a pre-pubertal body with fulsome, pert, youthful breasts. Of course this kind of body is much more likely to be found in adolescence especially before the pelvic development of late adolescence. To make the grade, there has been a growing demand for breast enlargement surgery in teenagers and young women as well as almost mandatory submission to waxing and "Brazilians".

Sexualisation as unifying element of sophisticated and complex marketing and advertising activity

Increasingly the culture of childhood and adolescence is shaped by a synergistic interplay between the marketing of products ranging from dolls to music, broadcasting and magazines. Each aspect of this interplay is characterised by the development of a medium to carry advertising and cross promotion. Each dimension promotes the other and therefore augments the capacity of the interplay to effectively carry and augment valuable advertising which then feeds through to increased corporate profits..

Channel 7's *Home and Away*, is part of a cross promotion with *Girlfriend* magazine and *Total Girl*. Other magazines including pre-teen magazines also promote the program heavily. Both the TV program and the magazines also carry advertising and promotion for other programs and products often with inclusion of "celebrities" . Their inclusion then promotes other programs and music. Much of this cross promotion is also carried out with the use of websites and online networking.

That much of the current structure of youth media is essentially an intricate web of advertising and marketing perhaps seems obvious but it is, in its complexity, intensity and reach, a reasonably new phenomenon.

Perhaps, to give this web or interplay additional economic and cultural force, a common persuasive theme or core motivator may be needed to unify and maximise the efficiency of marketing efforts across a range of products and services (TV show, magazine, music, music video show, fashion, celebrity, mobile phone downloads, cosmetic services etc) to build the synergy of the interplay.

²⁵ One of pornography's most popular sub-genres is dubbed "Barely Legal" and offers depictions of young women (so we are assured by the manufacturers) who look barely pubertal, with little breast development, young looking faces and bodies without curves. Nonetheless these young only just legal are always described as desperate for brutal porn-style sex. "Mainstream" pornography generally favours depiction of women who are thin and pre-pubertal in appearance except for large, unnaturally pert breasts. Women in these genres have no body hair , like children and obvious womanly curves are not found.

Sexualisation appears to operate in this way so that marketing and advertising is essentially working in concert to keep young people profoundly anxious about the acceptability of their appearance, personality and sexuality. Sexualised behaviours are also used as a badge of youth culture conformity or belonging.

Working in accidental or deliberate concert, marketers are able to harness the general vulnerability generated by sexualisation, convert it into a strong drive to "fix" the anxiety or guarantee belonging through consumption, directing it to this or that product or service. The operation of sexualisation in this way may have become a happy accident for marketers. Or its role as an orchestrating device for maximising marketing efficiency may have been consciously cultivated at least within corporations.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS

Parents are also being subjected to relentless sexualising marketing influences. Some may feel this through exposure to pornography whilst others will feel it through the media and advertising. Many parents may be led to begin concurring with the sexualisation of their children. They may reluctantly give in to pester power, not wanting to be non-conformist amongst other parents, or may enthusiastically participate in the sexualising culture or the sexualisation of their children. More research and exploration for the motivations of parents in agreeing to tolerate or to actively purchase sexualising products for children and teens. Australian parents, relatives and friends spent \$ 48 million on providing for Bratz dolls for children in 2006. Apparently, the tween market alone is worth \$4billion a year in Australia.²⁶

It is likely that some of these parents actually like, choose and prefer these sexualised products.

Possible reasons for parental participation in sexualisation include:

- Fear of being non-conformist amongst parent groups which could in turn be caused by a number of motivations.
- Fear of hostility or rebellion from their children
- Fear that resistance is futile and that the products will be bought or played or talked about with others and at other's homes or at school
- Failure to understand the importance of the loving and authoritative parenting style for children and adolescent wellbeing
- Failure to understand the stages and vulnerabilities of development, and the real developmental limitations of young people at various stages of development.
- Failure to understand the dangers of sexualisation

Some possible subconscious motivators might include:

- Pleasure in observing their children looking "cool", fashionable and even "sexy"
- Projection of their own frustration and anxieties concerning their incapacity to measure up to the pornified standards of social acceptability. With womanly bodies their choice of clothing is more limited and society will not recognise their physical appearance or shape as beautiful or even as ok.
- Vicarious pleasure and satisfaction experienced through the objectification of their children. Perhaps experiencing a sense of sexiness and attractiveness through their children as extensions or personifications that can override their own physical inadequacies..
- Being able to buy the clothes and dress their children in ways they desperately wanted to be able to do for themselves.

²⁶ Karen Brooks, *Consuming Innocence Popular Culture and Our Children* 2008 Universtiy of QLD Press pp.2, 38, 97

Parents may also be succumbing to sexualization themselves and seeking to alleviate their unease about their own bodies by objectifying their children as extensions of themselves. Their children may become vehicles for vicarious experiences of conformity to the "sexy" norms. This is likely to be a subconscious process. Pre teen and young teen girls are most likely to match up to those body shape and appearance standards which demand extreme thinness, no curves or hips, flat tummies, large eyes relative to other facial features.

The recent phenomenon of padded bras for pre-teens, even for littlies of 5 or 6, may in fact be related to some almost unconscious drive of mothers, whose bodies feel deeply inadequate to them, to live vicariously in the daughters. Only their children's' young bodies are acceptable, only they easily look good in so much of the contemporary fashions. Is this why we have seen a rise in the sexualisation of young girls after the emergence of sexualisation of adolescents in the context of an already pornified raunch culture.

If this analysis is even only partly correct, it does not absolve marketers, media and advertisers from their willingness to exploit these insecurities and desires. Indeed, if correct, it again points back to the role of industry in fuelling this sexualisation of teenagers and even perhaps adults for profit. They have a vested interest in the continued demand for their product, a demand which is perpetuated by the sexualisation of children and perhaps also adults in their advertising.

BENEFICIARIES OF SEXUALISATION

Ultimately, the beneficiaries of sexualisation will be the industries that have deliberately fostered and promoted it to achieve increased sales and profits. Broadcasting corporations, tween and teen fashion marketers, the cosmetic industry including cosmetic surgery, music, online industries. Those who have succumbed to sexualisation may temporarily gain feelings of empowerment but such gains have to be maintained by continued efforts to conform and to maintain one's sexual currency.

Other industry participants who have behaved ethically and refused to adopt the strategy of sexualization will have lost market share and profits. It may be that a backlash will restore their fortunes. Bratz appears to be retreating from some of the harder edged sexualising strategies the brand has been famous for.

CURRENT REGULATORY FAILURES

Failure of advertising standards regulation and the Advertising Standards Board (ASB)

Rush and La Nauze and the APA Taskforce addressed the issue of public advertising's contribution to the sexualisation of children. Rush and La Nauze, in particular focused on the way advertisers using public spaces and free to air TV have sabotaged parent's freedom of choice about the consumption by their children of deliberately provocative sexualised advertising content.

Our classification laws rest on a number of principles including the freedom to choose whether to consume this type of provocative sexualised, potentially offensive content or not. Other key principles refer to protection of society and also protection of children and teenagers from harmful content. Today, even teenagers are denied a choice about whether they will consume provocative, potentially harmful content.

The use of public space and airwaves is a privilege granted by society. Those who want to use it ought to be made to respect those principles rather than be allowed to flout them. Presently advertisers force us and our children to consume content they know is provocative and controversial when they place it in dominating positions over freeways or major intersections, railway stations, bus stops, the sides of buses or trams.

Broadcasters are increasingly crowding authentic family programming out of TV schedules and replacing it with sexualised programs or sexualised references and other content. Broadcasters and advertisers conspire to run ads with sexualising messages or depictions at this time.

Advertisers and broadcasters must know that some of this content will be quite confusing to children and possibly also disturbing. Many advertisers apparently need substantial education about the need to respect parental rights and the developmental needs of children and teenagers.

Advertising Standards Board (ASB) Response

The ASB has shown a consistent pattern of refusing to consider the impact of sexualised advertising. It has refused on many occasions to look behind claims, that marketing was directed at adults, to the reality that advertisers were also actively targeting teenagers or even children. In addition, the ASB refuses, nearly always, to consider the sexualising impact, on young people, of sexual content in adult directed ads in public spaces or on free to air TV.

Presently there is no specific reference to sexualisation of children, nor to the possible sexualising impact of adult advertising on children and teens in the Codes administered by the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA).

Further discussion of ASB decisions and the responses of the AANA and other industry participants are included in the Appendices. There is also a discussion there about the kinds of content that is potentially problematic for children and teenagers.

The AANA has just recently agreed to address the issue of sexualisation in its Code of Practice for Advertising to Children. Whilst the AFA wishes to acknowledge this move as a very encouraging step in the right direction, a great deal more needs to be done.

Reforms needed to advertising standards regulation and sexualised marketing generally

Any attempt to address sexualisation must also address

- marketing of sexualising products, media culture or services.
- The impact on and vulnerability of teenagers beyond the age of 14
- Parents' current lack of power to prevent their children's exposure to potentially sexualising content of public advertising and free to air broadcasting
- Teenagers, lack of freedom of choice about consumption of sexualising content in these forms, including on dominant billboard space, shop displays, and in advertising they encounter whilst watching films or television, consuming music industry products.
- collateral sexualising damage being inflicted on our young people from ostensibly adult directed marketing and advertising
- the need to restore real freedom of choice concerning the public's consumption of deliberately provocative sexualised imagery and messages.
- Need to restore ethical standards as a central requirement of good self regulatory approaches.

REFORM APPROACHES AND OTHER REMEDIAL MEASURES

Education of Parents and the community about:

- Developmental needs and vulnerabilities of children and adolescents
- Harms of and ways sexualisation may happen
- Strategies they can use to ameliorate or lessen impacts of sexualising content
- The research showing the important value of loving, authoritative, boundary setting parents to the wellbeing of young people.

Educational programs for young people to help them

- Better understand their development and resulting needs and vulnerabilities as they grow and change
- better understand the marketing and advertising strategies used to exploit their vulnerabilities.
- Develop and strengthen character traits or virtues that help them align their behaviours and choices with long term aspirations and values. (Using positive psychology approaches)²⁷
- Help them appreciate the importance of loving, authoritative parenting in their lives.
- Ensure that any programs addressing relationships and sexuality issues, are authentically respectful of adolescent development, avoid use of sexualising approaches or objectification and foster understandings of sexuality as relational, a communication of love by the whole person and oriented to commitment and fidelity. Any programs in relationships and sexuality must avoid compounding the sexualising influences of marketing, media and advertising.

Educational strategies for industry to develop

- Better understanding of the ethical underpinnings and social responsibility necessary for successful self regulation
- Awareness that the use of public spaces, and licensed use of airwaves is a privilege granted by society and that respect for the public, for parents and the exercise of social responsibility are an appropriate response.
- Awareness of the rights of the public and especially parents and young people to choose not to consume provocative sexualised advertising content. Such advertising should accordingly be limited to appropriate formats such as adult directed magazines rather than public billboards etc.

Reform of the regulatory regimes, including the codes of practice, of advertising, broadcasting are urgently needed to specifically address

- the legitimate rights of the public to choose not to consume provocative sexualised content
- the legitimate rights of parents to choose not to have their children exposed to sexualised content
- the profoundly unethical nature of deliberate or reckless exposure of young people and children to sexualising content or products
- the importance of respecting and facilitating the healthy development of children and young people
- the need for ethics and good faith to underpin successful self regulation
- the need to understand the privileges granted by society with broadcast licenses and the use of public spaces and the need for respect and social responsibility as an appropriate response from industry.

²⁷ Positive Psychology focuses on building character strengths and resilience. Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson are leaders in this new field. More information available at <http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/index.html> concerning positive psychology with links to other related programs included educational programs.

Specific regulatory changes needed include

Amendments to the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics and the Advertising to Children Code to prohibit unhealthy sexualising content including:

- Sexually provocative or highly sexualised images of adults or adolescents in any context where such depictions may impact on the psychological development children and adolescents
- Depictions that sexually objectify men or women, in locations or in ways that could adversely impact the healthy development of children and adolescents
- Depictions of children as focused on bodily appearance or dress, or as sexually aware or engaging in sexual behaviours

To address marketing and advertising impacts on young people more broadly:

- establishment of a Federal Office or Commissioner for Children's interests in Trade Practices located within the ACCC with the power to ban sexualised marketing practices and products that do not respect children's developmental needs and to co-ordinate educational programs for industry about the role of ethical marketing and social responsibility in the sustenance of self regulatory approaches.
- Ultimately, industry must be encouraged to recognize its responsibility for the harmful social impacts of its marketing and advertising. Regulation may be necessary. Education of the industry and the community about the developmental needs of children and the dangers of sexualisation is also needed.
- Requirements for wider industry codes of conduct that would prohibit marketing practices that can harm children and adolescents through harmful sexualisation, with requirements as above may need to be introduced. Such codes should require responsible commercial behaviour, including in products and services marketing, music, entertainment marketing and broadcasting, that respects the developmental needs of children and youth and that also allows parents, guardians and caregivers the reasonable capacity to limit or avoid exposure to products, messages or images judged developmentally inappropriate or harmful by a reasonable parent, guardian and caregiver.

Concerns about sexualisation are growing in Australia and overseas. Australia has the potential to become a world leader in innovative and effective strategies to achieve socially responsibility in marketing's response to the needs of young people

Complaints Processes Reform

Many in the community find the various complaints processes in relation to advertising, broadcasting and other matters very confusing, lacking in accessibility and accountability. The ASB is the most easily accessible and offers quick turn around and publicises reasons for decisions. Nonetheless, many in the community find even this process challenging. The author discovered that the system was probably routinely blocking complaints about broadcasters advertising their programming outside the broadcast format (eg on billboards etc). Complaints to broadcasters are more difficult and most find the very long delays in response extremely frustrating. Many believe that the complaints processes have been deliberately constructed to make effective complaining difficult. The response by broadcasters to complaints is routinely drawn out, with 60 days the agreed limit in the Code. Often it is then necessary to redirect complaints to ACMA. There is no clear complaints system for retailing and manufacturing of certain products.

- Reform is needed to make broadcasting complaints much easier to make and to ensure improved

response time and accountability.

Reform to streamline complaints processes, making them easier to manage, more accessible and more transparent and accountable maybe warranted. Complaints process experts could receive complaints from the public and direct them to the relevant responsible bodies. Principles of an effective, accountable and accessible complaints process would include:

- monthly turnaround times, requirements that responsible bodies respond within this monthly time frame with meaningful and accountable response processes
-

RELEVANT CONTEXTUAL CHILD DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Adolescents and normal development.

Whilst adolescence is a challenging and sometimes difficult experience for young people, healthy development, undisturbed by sexualisation, together with appropriate family, community and social support helps foster positive and rewarding experience and outcomes overall for young people.

Adolescents are often regarded as simply less experienced and slightly less physically developed adults. Under this conceptualisation, education is seen as the way to address the shortfall in experience so that teens are better equipped to make good "adult" decisions. However, neurobiological studies of the development of the adolescent brain have reinforced psychologists' theorising about the extensive and challenging developmental program of the teenage years. Neurobiological studies are revealing dramatic renovation and construction work happening in the adolescent brain from puberty.

Adolescents' real and significant developmental vulnerabilities can make good decision making, risk avoidance or withstanding advertising or peer pressure, very difficult. Such vulnerabilities help to explain why sexualisation may happen and is so harmful to teenagers. Constant exposure to sexualising content may in fact influence the final structure of neural pathways in young people making authentic, respectful relational sexual expression more difficult to achieve. Adverse impacts on final neural pathway structures may also set young people up for a range of serious psychological disablements. Objectifying behaviours or attitudes may become established patterns at a neurobiological level.

Marketing and media behaviour and strategies aimed at exploitation of teenage developmental vulnerability are not ethical or socially responsible.

Puberty timing likely to be stable

Some participants in the debate about sexualisation have argued that the changes apparent in "tween" and young teen culture or behaviour are largely attributable to an alleged trend of earlier puberty. However, such a trend has not yet been established to the satisfaction of a range of endocrinologists and other experts. Obesity, ethnic differences and socio-economic factors in the United States have added to the complexity of the picture but a growing number of experts are highly sceptical of change. It is becoming clearer that the American and also Australian girls of today are still likely to have their first period at around the same age as their mother and to be situated within the same normal spread characteristic of menarche for, at least, several generations. Obesity and calorie rich diets may be contributing to the earlier appearance of breast fat in girls but such a phenomenon's relationship to puberty as a precise physiological process is not clear.²⁸ It is also likely that increased surveillance of girls bodies may lead to greater attention being given to the appearance of breast development or fat deposition than at any other time in history. Menarche has always been the main cultural marker of

²⁸ R L. Rosenfield, L K. Bachrach, S D. Chernausk, and five others, "Current Age of Onset of Puberty" Letter to the Editor, M E. Herman-Giddens, E Slora, R Wasserman; In Reply PEDIATRICS Vol. 106 No. 3 September 2000, pp. 622-623.; Tony James, What's New?-an interview with Associate Professor Susan Sawyer, *Australian Doctor*, 24 June 2003; The Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young Victorians *ibid*

puberty and there is little evidence of any significant or generalised change to its timing in modern times that has not been potentially relatable to poor nutrition or strenuous physical demands.

As such, arguments that defend or explain the phenomenon of raunch culture in the "tween" years with reference to trends towards earlier puberty and a decline in the age of the beginning of adolescence should be rejected. It is far more plausible that a culture has been fostered by marketers or sections of society that encourages imitation of adolescent behaviours rather than addressing any substantial change in underlying child development programs.

Historical conceptions of childhood

Child and adolescent development processes are well researched and described in the literature of psychology. It is well understood that children and adolescents are necessarily vulnerable because of their natural inbuilt developmental program. Particular vulnerabilities vary with the different stages of this development. Ethical responses from responsible adults, their communities and society lead to the provision of special care and protection to children and traditionally also to adolescents.

In some discussions of the need to provide nurture and protection for children and adolescents, some argue that these concerns are peculiar to recent western societies. However, historians of childhood and the family have found that special care, protection and nurture for children and teenagers has generally been recognised almost universally as an obligation of parents and communities. Historians have also found that adolescents were generally subject to adult care and supervision, albeit less intensively than in childhood. Societies have consistently sought to deter sexual involvements and pregnancy in the early and middle years of adolescence. Historians have found that generally, marriage has been encouraged for and was a typical life event of the early twenties. A number of historians have asserted that such marriages were usually matches grounded mainly in love or attraction. Child or early marriage was usually a feature of ruling classes and designed to shore up familial or monarchical power.²⁹

Sexual activity and other sexualised behaviours are associated with other risks to teenagers.

Premature sexual involvement in prepubescent children or even in young teenagers would be almost universally greeted with concern. However, there is much research indicating that any sexually active teen is placed at higher risk of a range of significant negative outcomes.

Research indicates that teen sexual activity puts adolescents at greater risk of poorer academic performance even when there are no pregnancies³⁰. In addition teen sexual involvement is a predictor of poorer psychological outcomes including depression and self harm. Adolescents are more prone to

²⁹ See for example Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children Parent-child relations from 1500- 1900*, 1983 Cambridge University Press, Peter, N. Stearns, *Growing Up: The History of Childhood in a Global Context (Edmondson Lecture Series)* 2005 Baylor University Press, USA, Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times; (Themes in History)* 2001 Polity, Cambridge UK; H Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*, 2005 Pearson Education, Great Britain; Ferdinand Mount, *The Subversive Family: An Alternative History of Love and Marriage* (1992) Macmillian NY

³⁰ Robert Rector and Kirk A. Johnson, "Teenage Sexual Abstinence and Academic Achievement, The Heritage Foundation," August 2005 - A study analyzing data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a cohort of 14,000 teens in 1994, 1995, and 2001, finding consistent and robust correlations between teen virginity and several positive academic outcomes even after accounting for socio-economic differences.

sexually transmitted infection and to suffer greater physiological harm from such infections.³¹ Yet the sexualising content of media and marketing often implies that such sexual behaviour is normal and expected for young people.

³¹ *The Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young Victorians* ibid in which the elevated risks for those younger than 16 are emphasised; Examples of research indicating risks linked to teen sex include Michael Grossman, Sara Markowitz, "I Did What Last Night?! Adolescent Risky Sexual Behaviors and Substance Abuse" *Eastern Economic Journal* Vol. 31, Number 3. summer, 2005. Page(s) 383-405; Hallfors, Denise D. Waller, Martha W., Bauer, Daniel; Ford, Carol A.; and Halpern, Carolyn T. "Which Comes First in Adolescence?--Sex and Drugs or Depression?" *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* Vol. 29, Number 3. , 2005. Page(s) 163-170.; Armour, Stacy Haynie, Dana L "Adolescent Sexual Debut and Later Delinquency", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* Vol. 36, Number . February, 2007. Page(s) 141-152.

Appendix 1

ADVERTISING STANDARDS REGULATION - Industry Moves to head off Government Crackdown on Advertising.

February 2008 Angela Conway

Declining marketing and advertising standards' impact on children and young people is attracting the attention of both the media and the industry.

The industry is reported to be repositioning its role in self regulation in the face of a possibility of renewed government intervention. The AANA (Australian Association of National Advertisers - producers and retailers) is apparently opening the door to other industry participants, namely the advertising firms and the media. There are also indications that Australia's self regulatory scheme may be aligned with or moved within the European Advertising Standards Alliance. Ostensibly these moves are to enable higher standards in regulation.³²

Such developments might auger well for advertising standards or then again, perhaps alarm bells should be ringing. Moving the centre of control to a European council or alliance may make it more difficult for the public or our governments to push for changes to practices and codes.

At present, debate about advertising standards is presently a two way affair, with the possibility of Government participation a possibility. The federal government does have considerable powers that can be used to impose regulations and standards on the industry. The new self regulatory system, with the Advertising Standards Board (ASB) acting as adjudicator over complaints, has only been operating since 1997.

Pressure on industry to promote its self regulation system has come from international bodies and from the community leading to gradual heightening of the profile of the ASB. Improvements in transparency and ease of access have come in recent years, so that it is now easier to make complaints and to track the decision-making patterns of the board. Nonetheless, the ASB is an industry body and its deliberations about advertising standards are constricted by the various industry codes and the interests of advertisers.

To give the industry credit, the codes go further in identifying social responsibility than European industry standards. But the codes and the regulatory model focus primarily on the right of industry to advertise.

The advertising to children code and the codes related to the advertising of food and beverages have been strengthened in recent years but many child and adolescent development experts still have concerns about many aspects of advertising directed at young people. An industry inquiry is set to report by the middle of the year on possible further changes.

As for advertising to adolescents and adults, all's fair in the "love" and the profit wars of the modern advertising game; as long as you play by the limited rules of the codes. Avoid depictions of unsafe or illegal practices such as driving without seat belts; avoid racist vilification; treat sex, sexuality and nudity "sensitively" and appropriately; no genitals or full frontal nudity; play fairly and honestly with the consumer and don't tell lies about the product; and the advertiser should be fine.

To be fair, the ASB does uphold complaints sometimes, and often these have related to health and safety issues. A recent Fosters ad for Corona was held to be in breach of the codes for suggesting the characters were combining alcohol consumption with bike riding along a road. To make matters worse, the cyclist wore no

³² See Fiona Jolley, ASB CEO in AdStandard News 12/07 or Paul McIntyre Marketing Editor, *Advertisers loosen hold on codes*, Sydney Morning Herald, October 18, 2007

helmet. The complaint related to a billboard but Fosters had invested in a multi media campaign involving cinema and other ads as well. Its withdrawal of the whole campaign no doubt cost the company heavily. If Fosters had chosen, instead, to show its characters involved in an erotically charged and semi naked entanglement on the beach with coronas in hand then they might have found their investment a safer bet with the ASB.

Many experts and community groups feel that the codes do not facilitate an appropriate response to advertising's broader role in the community and in public as a pervasive media impacting on all including children and adolescents. And it is the impact on children and adolescents of the heavily sexualised advertising purportedly directed at adults that is a key concern.

Advertisers have been given access, by our laws, to large amounts of public space and objects, as well as public free to air television. This type of advertising is difficult or impossible to avoid. This was tolerable to the community until advertisers began to ramp up the sexual content of their ads, increasingly imagery borrowed from *Playboy* or R rated or Porn films to create unmistakably provocative, offensive, sexual meanings or actions. Images or text pertaining to sexual dysfunction, soft porn, prostitution, or extreme objectification of women's or girls' bodies is common on billboards and other public advertising. Gone are the days when such "adult meanings" could be coded discreetly into the ad in such a way as to bypass children, young or even older teens. If you wanted in-your-face sexual content you could choose it -in magazines, films or television programs with appropriate ratings.

It's choice that has been jettisoned in this present advertising free-for-all. Choice for ourselves and choice for our children and our parenting.

In one outrageous response, to a complaint to the ASB last year, Australian Medical Institute (AMI on the billboards) had the cheek to insist that parents ought not stand in the way of their children's exposure to sexual content and media. They ought to be ensuring as early a "sex education" as possible and cited, erroneously, psychologist Michael Carr Greg as support - presumably for the idea that erectile dysfunction or the need for longer lasting sex should be on the syllabus for littlies or at least for "teenagers" as young as "eight". What sexual health expertise!³³

The ASB seems to be most reluctant to adjust to the growing anger in the community about the situation. There is some evidence that some Board members have taken a tougher view on advertising standards but are outvoted or constrained by the limitations and inadequacy of the codes.

One board member, Anne Drummond, recently acknowledged in the ASB's AdStandard News of December 2007, that the ASB is only as good as the codes it administers. Perhaps she and some others on the Board are increasingly frustrated with the failure of the codes to accommodate community and expert concerns about use of objectification, sex and sexuality in advertising and the impact on children of such elements.

Whether they were for or against Lee Jeans' sultry, suggestive lolita or the perky Nandos addicted pole dancer, it seems that the most important aspect of board members' contributions is their healthy sense of humour and avoidance of all "wowsers" tendencies. ³⁴There is no doubt that humour is an important ingredient of

³³ Complaint Ref 20/07 re AMI billboard ad dismissed 13 Feb 07 at www.adstandards.com.au

³⁴ See for example the ASB's press release Humour not lost on the Board of 26 April 2007 at www.adstandards.com.au or ASB member, John Brown's characterisation of complainants concerned about sexual content in advertising as humourless in AdStandard News 12/07

advertising and when executed well is also appreciated in the community. Humour however cannot nullify the sexualising impact of such advertising on children.

Ironically, a recent ASB survey of community satisfaction with the performance of the Board revealed dissatisfaction with the uptight and, dare we say, wowsery response to humourous but politically incorrect advertising.

Whilst this kind of wowseryism annoyed the community, the ASB's laxity, and failure to take seriously, community concerns about sexual content was the most significant cause of community dissatisfaction. With such findings, it is hoped that accusations about wowseryism will cease. ASB CEO, Fiona Jolley stated that "Board members have embraced the community feedback and will be taking the results into account in their consideration of complaints under the Code from its next meeting. The Board has already discussed the need for its decisions to more accurately reflect the community's standards on advertisements that portray sex, sexuality or nudity and discrimination or vilification."

However, Jolley also seemed to suggest that such views might not be representative because "The diversity of views expressed by the Board represents the different standards within the community,"³⁵

Jolley has also stated that despite the survey results and other evidence of community concern, there will be no changes to the standards codes.³⁶

If observers felt that this might look like intransigence on the part of the ASB, their fears would not be allayed with subsequent ASB announcements and decisions. Since this survey, the ASB has continued to dismiss most complaints about sexual content of advertising. The ASB proudly announced its tally of dismissals versus upheld complaints for 2007. Of course the former outnumbered the latter, especially in the area of complaints about sexual issues. Is the ASB still proud that it dismissed over 300 complaints against the Nando's Pole Dancer Ad last year? Surely it would have been possible to make some kind of comment indicating a failure in regard to this advertisement at least, given the number of complaints and the survey findings.

As one advertising industry expert, Dr Stephen Downes³⁷ has commented, it is a market truism that a small number of complaints is always the tip of an iceberg of dissatisfaction. The treatment of Nandos' ad should be an indication to the industry of the failure of the self regulatory system. Nandos exemplifies and the ASB reveals an industry currently unable or unwilling to put some boundaries of decency around their commercial activities. It is, of course, entirely possible that there are still many in the industry who seek to operate within the bounds of decency but if they are there, their voice is not getting through.

This last few months another raft of advertising complaints were dismissed. Of course many complaints relate to issues of health and safety or vilification but there is a continual stream of complaints relating to sexual content and objectification.

One little star on the horizon twinkled when the ASB upheld a complaint against a mobile phone porn download company. The ASB felt that the content of the TV ad went well beyond the MA15+ classification (and into R or even X territory) and was therefore unsuitable to be televised at any time.

³⁵ ASB press release of 4 Dec 2007 Advertising Standards Bureau releases world first research

³⁶ Natalie Tkaczuk Sikora, Sexy ads go too far, say experts, Herald Sun December 06, 2007

³⁷ Dr Stephen Downes *Who Gives A FCUK about Advertising Standards*, Crikey 26 Feb 2008

Nonetheless, the ASB, here and in several other similar complaints that were dismissed, was at pains to emphasise that such companies were legally entitled to advertise their soft porn wares. You and I might readily imagine an appropriately discrete approach to such advertising. Perhaps the ASB thinks MA15+ content is discrete but once upon a time PG rated content was considered such. Interestingly, humour was once an indispensable tool of discretion.

Of course, anyone remotely familiar with the habits of teenagers will know that they are often in front of the TV in the late stages of the evening. For some years now, programs such as *Nikita*, *Buffy*, *Alias*, *Rage*, *Farscape*, *Stargate* and *Triple J TV* have been programmed late at night to attract night owl teenagers. Gaming and digital tv have changed things a little but increasingly, mobile phone porn or ringtone downloads advertising has been targeted at these teen night owls or teens handy with the digital recorder.

So it is hard to understand why the ASB never alludes to this reality in its deliberations about such advertising. Even when a parent expresses upset that her teenager is confronted with these ads placed heavily throughout a repeat episode of *Lost*.

Wilful ignorance or heads-in-the-sand is the standard response of the board when it comes to the collateral damage suffered by young people from in-your-face inescapable advertising purportedly directed at adults. In a case earlier last year, a condom manufacturer sought to paint itself as virtuous for seeking to place its heavily sexualised billboard ad in the inner suburbs and the city because these locations were allegedly away from children. Such a crazy assertion went unchallenged by the ASB who commended the company for quickly addressing a misplaced billboard near a suburban primary school. Does the ASB really think that kids don't travel through inner suburbs of our cities? In fact many children live in these areas.

Children and teenagers, in fact are being bombarded with erotic and sexualised images every time they travel in their communities or cities. These messages and images press in on their consciousness long before they can process them in adult ways. It's part of their developmental program that they are active in seeking to make sense of the world and their place in it. Teenagers are being bombarded with these ads on TV. Then there are magazines, shop displays and music pushing sexualisation on young people as well.

Girls self esteem is withering on the vine in the face of this scorching message. They learn sexual moves and poses long before they can understand their meanings. They learn that perfect appearance and sexual currency are necessary for peer acceptance and any kind of social participation. They learn that other aspects of personality are worthless. Boys learn to view women as sexual objects rather than whole persons and that their existence and their relationships are ultimately only about their sexual prowess and personal pleasure.

The rising statistics on psychological difficulties including eating disorders, self harm, suicide and depression and anxiety should be enough to call the industry to order. Experts and parents are concerned about the decline in normal activities and interests necessary for healthy development in childhood and adolescence. Premature sexual involvements are on the rise and are typically characterised by regrets, coercion and serious problems of psychological adjustment. Much research indicates that this development will feed through to poorer academic outcomes and increased rates of substance abuse.

The community is right to be angry and concerned. Self regulation appears to have been a recipe for the collapse in advertising standards we have seen over the last couple of years. We need to reclaim public spaces and airwaves for the families, children and our communities. We need to continue sending complaints to the ASB to leave them in no doubt that the community wants industry to recognise its social responsibilities to young people and parents.

Appendix 2- ASB CONTINUED FAILURE TO ADDRESS SEXUALISATION ISSUE

More Advertising Standards Board fiascos

Angela Conway July 2007

Our Advertising Standards Bureau continues to respond to complaints with an extraordinary disregard for the developmental needs and capacities of children. Absence of an appeals process and lack of accountability for Board decisions is an ongoing problem and was highlighted in June with its response to a huge volume of complaints about the Nandos' Pole Dancer Advertisement.

Over the month of June it considered and rejected complaints concerning 5 advertisements with sexual content that were delivered to audiences likely to contain children and young teenagers. In each case, the board decided that the advertising was not directed at children even though children were likely to encounter the ads.

The television ads included one for Zoo Weekly containing references to "celebrity sex tips" in the current issue and depicting an office in which all the females present were wearing only underwear. One of the males is depicted looking at sexy images on his computer screen and soft porn magazines are shown on his desk. The Board found that since the advertisement was classified PG it was appropriate that it was shown during PG times (before 8.30pm). They also found that it depicted sex and sexuality sensitively enough to warrant the dismissal of the complaints. It did not regard the juxtaposition of clothed men with underwear-clad women as warranting any finding of nudity or other grounds on which to uphold complaints. The Board gave no attention to the impact such advertising might have on the psychological development of children or young teenagers.

Complaints about the Heinz 2 Minute Soup advertisement again rated PG and screening in family viewing times, were similarly rejected. At the start of this ad, a man, without any obvious clothing, is depicted lying on top of a woman in bed and both are breathless. While he sleeps she collects her soup from the microwave just as the timer goes off. Complaints in regard to a radio ad about "the blokes [being] embarrassed and the wives ... upset" and spruiking help for premature ejaculation and erection problems was also considered tasteful and sensitive and acceptable within the Advertising Codes. Although complainants explicitly mentioned their children's difficulties with such advertisements, the Board did not consider any possible effects on children even though it was clear that they would be likely to be part of their audiences.

Likewise, the Board rejected complaints about the large Billboard advertising the bar and strip venue, *Showgirls*. Again, the Board made no attempt to address the impact such advertising could have on children despite acknowledging in its written decision that this was the main concern of the complainant. The board also acknowledged that the Billboard was prominent and likely to be seen by children. However, they felt that the pink and black "sexy" lingerie and stilettos-clad woman reclining in the context of the text "showgirls" treated sex and sexuality with sensitivity and was reasonable given the type of venue advertising. They argue that her posture was not overtly sexual and that the lingerie covered her body so that there could be no concerns about nudity.

Interestingly the Board did uphold complaints about Roadshow's radio advertising for the movie *Zodiac* which contained menacing references to the shooting murder of children and the location of their bodies. The decision states:

"The Board considered that this advertisement presented quite a high level of violence in its combination of suspenseful music and dialogue. The Board noted that the advertisement was a *radio advertisement and that there was therefore a broad audience for the advertisement, and that such audience would include children*. The Board considered that the level of violence presented in the advertisement was excessive for the product advertised, *particularly considering the age of the potential audience*. On this basis the Board determined that the advertisement breached section 2.2 of the Code and upheld the complaint. [my emphasis]

In this case Roadshow had finished with the ad prior to the Board determination. There were no fines or other punitive measures imposed for knowingly frightening children.

Unfortunately the sensible reasoning of the Zodiac Ad decision was not repeated in other deliberations during the month of June especially when sexual content was in question.

The Board's determination regarding the Nando's Pole Dancing advertisement again highlights their unwillingness to address the needs of children and teenagers. This Advertisement has been screening on television after 8.30pm and at the cinemas. The Advertisement was rated M because of its adult content including depictions of near-nudity.

The Advertisement uses a convoluted fictional element of anti craving patches and gum to convey the addictive qualities of Nando's food. The advertisers then used a story of a pole dancing mum on which to hang the plot device of the gum and patch.

The majority of the Board found in favour of the advertisement but did note that a large volume of complaints (reported as being 200) has been received.

In the Zodiac decision, the Board recognised that the likely presence of children in the radio audience meant that the advertiser ought to have avoided the frightening impact, in view of the sensitivities of children.

The Nando's ad, screened extensively in conjunction with the latest instalment of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, was likely to be seen by a substantial number of teenagers or older children. The Board sought to get around this by arguing such audience members would have parental guidance. That there may be older children and young teenagers watching TV after 8.30pm was also of no consequence for the Board in this matter.

The Board majority found that the level of nudity used "was essential to ensuring authenticity" and a coherent story line. The pole dancer couldn't use the fictitious patch because that put the patrons off her backside so she needed the fictitious gum instead. The Board concluded that the concept necessitated showing that the woman "for professional reasons, can't wear the Nando-fix patch."

Whilst the Board majority might live in a postmodern ivory tower, the pole dancing story line was such an offensive and gratuitous stretch that many viewers were left wondering just what was being advertised- pole dancing, g-strings, gum, patches or chicken?

The Board majority accepted Nando's view that the ad was not degrading to women and that "Pole dancing had become mainstream" and was a "popular form of exercise". Nando's evidence in support of this assertion was not examined although there is evidence that the minority insisted that pole dancing was not mainstream or popular. The Board majority appeared to accept without question Nando's citing of the example of Martha, a character in Channel 7's *Home and Away*, "who works as a pole dancer."

However, if the Board wants to use a storyline from *Home and Away* to justify their findings then they ought to use it properly. Martha's pole dancing in Summer Bay was controversial and shocking to all her true friends. These friends (nearly all the main characters) felt that she was being manipulated and used at a time when she was vulnerable by a boyfriend who turned out to be a rather nasty criminal. Did the Board discuss the portrayal in *Home and Away* in which the true friends saw her pole dancing as sleazy and harmful? Did the Board note that to the relief of all her true friends, Martha ceased pole dancing some time ago amidst a crisis involving drug-busts, arson, theft, other criminal activities and a brush with death?

Pole dancing is not mainstream and is not a popular form of exercise. Where are the statistics to support the Board majority's contention?

The Board majority has presumed to draw the conclusion that the Nando's Ad "was not incompatible with family values" despite receiving a large volume of complaints about the ad. On what basis could the Board draw this conclusion? Surely the Board must be aware of extensive critiques and discourse about the corrosive effects of such content and activities on healthy and respectful relationships between men and women and on women's self esteem and body image. I am certainly aware of alternative critiques that attempt to portray such content and activities as harmless and liberating to women. No doubt this is the underlying stance of the ASB but I don't think that it is a view shared by many others in Australia.

The ASB has failed again to grasp the seriousness of the problem of the distorting effects on healthy development such advertising is having on children and young teenagers. This issue is regarded most seriously by growing numbers in the community and also by a large numbers of experts working in the field of child and adolescent mental health. Has the ASB read the reports of the Australia Institute and the American

Psychological Association? Do they understand that the incidence of body image and eating disorders is rising in the community amongst children as young as 8 and teenagers? Does the ASB understand the connections posited between such outcomes and advertising content that is sexual in nature or that implies that only certain body types are acceptable?

It is reported that the Board majority accepted Nando's view that the ad "depicted a strong in-control woman who went about her work in a professional manner", because it showed her travelling to work wearing a suit..." Does the ASB know anything about the so-called "adult industry" and the women who work in it?

The Nando's Ad is a lie. It tries to depict Pole dancing as normal and something any well adjusted and caring mother would do to make money. The reality is sadly very different. Pole dancing women are more likely to have histories of drug use, family dysfunction and often also child sexual abuse. Any ordinary young women contemplating pole dancing ought to look at the nature of the industry and the prevalence of violence against the women who work in it. They ought to consider also the likelihood of developing drug habits and psychiatric problems.

The "Adult Industry" is riddled with drugs, violence and criminal elements. It helps, even in Australia, to drive a massive international trafficking of women and children. Pole dancing is the warm up act for lap dancing and stripping and it is all about the sexual gratification of men and the objectification of women.

Have the ASB Board watched the sub-contractor women going to their "jobs" in King Street, Melbourne? They have costume bags and makeup cases but they don't wear suits. Has the Board studied the working conditions of such workers? Did the Board make itself aware of recent reporting on the criminal elements involved in the "Adult Industry" outlets and "clubs" on King St and elsewhere in Melbourne just last week in the Age Newspaper? Has the ASB seen how women strippers or pole dancers might be thrown down stairs and kicked in the street, dragged by their hair or shot because a man gets angry?

The ASB Board is reported as arguing that the "ad had not broken any rules regarding permissible levels of nudity". Apparently, the Board is happy to split hairs about whether thrusting almost completely naked buttocks in the face of a man fitted in to rules about nudity. The Board did not address how a 12 or 13 year old would begin to make sense of such a depiction?

The Code on Advertising to Children stipulates that advertisements to children must not mislead or deceive children. Nor can they portray images or events which depict unsafe situations which may encourage children to engage in dangerous activities. However despite knowing full well about the sizeable portion of kids 14 and under in the audiences it has targeted, Nandos can escape responsibility because the Board is not looking at the real nature of target audiences. It never entered the Board's heads to question the assumption that the Nandos' advertisement wasn't directed at least in part to children and young teenagers.

Australians who have expressed dismay at this ad are well aware of the ways in which advertisers seek to see how much "boundary pushing" they can get away with. This sexualised and nearly nude portrayal creates many messages and meanings about women's bodies, women's personhood, sexuality and relationships. Most of these meanings or messages are harmful to the healthy development of young people and harmful to the status of women. They are also harmful to relationships between men and women. This is the view of many in the community. Some have arrived at that view because they have thought about and studied the issues. Others in the community arrived at this view instinctively.

The ASB Board's refusal to adequately respond to the views of ordinary Australians and many experts is regrettable to say the least.

Even if the Board will not look at the broader critique about pornography and the "adult industry" there is still enough cold hard facts available to recognise the toxicity of the Nandos ad's warm endorsement of pole dancing as a lucrative and healthy career option. The message that pole dancing is an attractive, fun and hassle free job is a dangerous message to give teenage girls. The Board's failure to rein in this toxic ad campaign is a disgrace.

Appendix 3 Sexualising Elements of Advertising Content

This is slightly adapted from advice to help readers and members identify and distinguish potentially sexualising elements of sexual or other depictions or content in advertising and whether such advertising was "public" and therefore likely to be consumed by children or teenagers.

The advertising complaints process is reportedly difficult to negotiate. Many who are unhappy with certain advertisements and prepared to complain are nonetheless intimidated by the various codes administered by the ASB and uncertain about whether these codes render their complaints' issues irrelevant. Many potential complainants have sought advice as to how they can formulate their complaints and concerns so that the ASB will address their concerns.

Which Ads should I complain about?

Some good rules of thumb when assessing whether an ad is problematic are

Is the ad likely to be encountered by children or young teenagers? Outdoor advertising on billboards, trams etc is, by its nature, public advertising that will certainly be encountered by young people. Emphasise that children's literacy development is often advanced enough to read such advertising by the age of 6 or 7 and sometimes earlier. Children and young people are avid consumers of outdoor advertising and seek to make sense of its messages about the world. Older children and young teenagers encountered the Nandos Pole Dancing Ad whilst attending screenings of the latest *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie this year. The ad had an M rating as did the film.

Covers of newspapers or mainstream magazines ought to be regarded as semi-public and as potential exposure points for inappropriate advertising. Target audience for the publication would shed light on whether advertising inside the paper or magazine is likely to be a problem for young people. Ordinary newspapers are not appropriate unsupervised reading for children and young teens. In television advertising, timing is a key issue. Some late night TV teenage programming is laced with copious ads for prostitutes and soft porn mobile phone downloads.

Is the ad depicting something children would see as part of normal life or is it highly sexualised? They might see a bit of private nudity with mum and dad or their siblings. Children have typically been taught that such nudity is private, within the home and family or perhaps with the doctor or nurse. They might see mum or dad in various stages of getting dressed in private. They may see their parents or other couples kissing or cuddling. Hopefully they will not have seen open displays of erotic or intense sexual behaviours. Exposure of children to explicit sexual behaviour in real life is a child protection issue. Hopefully they have not seen women being groped by numbers of men at once in real life, although they may have had the misfortune to see such depictions in advertising in recent years.

Is the ad depicting something that could be easily and comprehensively explained by a child with normal development and experience or will the child struggle to make sense of the ad or a particular depiction in the ad because it is so highly and exclusively sexualised. Because children are developmentally driven to seek meaning in their experiences, such impasses may work to push the child towards sexualisation.

Does the ad objectify women's bodies? The objectification of women's bodies is harmful to healthy psychological development and sexuality based on mutual love and relationship. Women's bodies are objectified when they are displayed just for sexual purposes, as decoration only with vacuous or sexualised expressions and usually without any meaningful context. Objectification can also take the form of showing only parts of a woman's body, often without her face. Such objectification can harm young girls' self esteem, body image and capacity to relate on an equal footing with the opposite sex. Boy's sexuality is harmed too as they are encouraged to develop a crudely exploitative attitude to girls instead of developing a relationship oriented sexuality. The objectified depiction of women especially when the face or personality is obscured can also lead to male perceptions of women as de-humanised.

Teenagers will be affected by exposure to pornographic and objectifying depictions that demean women or that undermine the development of a relationship-oriented sexuality.

Does the ad present impossible ideals of physical appearance? Does the ad depict women or men as impossibly thin or perfect or muscular and tanned. Often such images are the result of starvation diets and heavy digital enhancements. They sow anxiety in young peoples minds and feed body image and eating disorder problems and self-harm.

Does the ad contribute to sexualised social atmosphere that may contribute to younger or more frequent teenage sexual involvements? For teenagers who have more knowledge and understanding of sexuality and behaviour, a key concern will be the impact of exposure to highly sexualised advertising on their sexuality and sexual behaviour. There is growing evidence that exposure to media depictions of sex may be linked to increased and earlier sexual involvement. Most research indicates that adolescents are better off if sexual initiation can be delayed until at least adulthood. Advertisers have a responsibility to restrain their highly sexualised advertising to adults' only contexts.

Angela Conway: Young ones won't be young for long

Stop stealing our daughters' childhoods for cold commercial gain

12oct06 The Australian

Gone are the days of voluminous, bulky and cumbersome underwear meant to be worn under layers of clothing. These days underwear has become briefer, bolder and more stylish. There is even underwear to complement different moods you wish to portray: frisky, seductive or mysteriously alluring.

NO, this isn't a pitch to the sophisticated women's market. It is the way one British web search company (Jellydeal) introduces the latest trends in little girls' underwear, trends that are also evident in Australian retail outlets for children's wear. Padded, decorative bras in sizes 6 to 10 have recently been put on the market under labels including Target, Barbie, Saddle Club, Disney and Bratz.

Little girls like pretty things but do they need bras with padding? And should they learn so early that their bodies are for flaunting? More than just another nail in the coffin of childhood, these underwear trends contribute to the premature sexualising of children with cynical disregard for the consequences.

Bratz' involvement in the marketing trends extends beyond its little girls' lingerie to the doll range. Its latest dolls, Bratz Babyz, have a milk bottle dangling jauntily across their thighs as they go from the high chair to "ruling the mall" with their "passion for fashion". On the way, so the Bratz website animations go, the Bratz Babyz, in belly-bearing glittery outfits, are the stars of a pop concert. The subtext is that even babies are sexy and far more sophisticated than grown-ups could imagine.

Some argue the Bratz phenomenon is no big deal, just toys and clothes with attitude. But Bratz dolls promote an obsession with shopping, heavy make-up and provocative fashion. Big players in this game have tried to dismiss community concern about the aggressive push, on the back of raunch culture, into the so-called tweens and younger children's market as the

moral panic of a few. But this week's publication of the Australia Institute paper *Corporate Paedophilia*, by Emma Rush and Andrea La Nauze, should signal that it is child protection, not politics, that drives this backlash.

Some retailers have tried to dismiss the case put by Rush and La Nauze. Never mind that contemporary children's fashion and its marketing have taken an unprecedented turn in the time it has taken for my daughters to grow through their childhood to the brink of adolescence. The ambiguities of the Bratz products' images are creepily reminiscent of the kinds of fantasies and warped perceptions of women and girls so central to pornography. Defenders of raunch culture say turning pornographic imagery into a weapon of "girl power" liberates girls and women. But just how powerful will little girls be when, with pelvises thrust forward, they have learned the scripted moves and obsessions of the Bratz dolls, underwear, website and DVDs? They will take on a sexualised language they cannot possibly understand. And it will be done at their peril.

The Bratz doll range echoes the fantasies and common beliefs of pedophiles researched by Kurt Eichenwald of *The New York Times*. He found that a core belief running through pedophile conversations on the internet revolved around children's purported sexual autonomy, desire for sexual relations with adults and their rights to freedom of sexual expression.

Eichenwald reported on common preferences among pedophiles for images of children about five years old dressed in diapers or in sexually provocative, revealing clothing and lingerie, similar to many of the Bratz dolls. The animations on the Bratz website show Bratz Babyz being bathed while looking fetchingly grown-up and knowing. The similarities to Eichenwald's description of images of nine-year-old "Sparkles" in the bath posted on pedophile blogs seem striking. Eichenwald shows that much of the pedophile activity on the web has switched to porn sites masquerading as children's modelling sites.

The links between search terms such as "little girls' lingerie" to pedophilia become apparent with a web search. Revealed are sales pitches such as "lingerie for petite little girls; watch our little models showing off sexy lingerie". In the cold light of proliferating internet pedophile networks and child porn sites, the purveyors of raunch culture for little girls may just seem plain foolish. At the very least, they are stealing childhood for cold commercial gain. At worst, they may be contributing mightily to a grooming process that the pedophiles of this world will thank them for.

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