

Supplementary Submission to the Senate Inquiry on the Sexualisation of Children.

Kids Free 2B Kids
Julie Gale
Director
24/4/08

This submission contains images.

To the Senate Committee,

Firstly, the use of terms.

It appears common for people to confuse the ‘premature sexualisation of children’, with children’s ‘naturally emerging sexuality’. (as noted in a number of submissions and responses)

There are certainly major distinctions between the two and hopefully the senate committee will be able to discern between those respondents who truly understand the difference, and those who don’t.

KF2bK considers a child’s naturally emerging sexuality as a normal healthy part of being human.

KF2bK believes that the distinctions between ‘premature sexualisation’ and ‘sexuality’ are drawn in much of the research listed below.

Research and Reports relevant to the issue of the premature sexualisation of children and young teens:

- Corporate Paedophilia. The Australia Institute. 2006
- Letting Children Be Children. The Australia Institute. 2006
- The American Psychological Association’s taskforce on the sexualisation of young girls. 2007
- The Australian Psychological Society’s guidelines for parents on the sexualisation of children. 2007
- Youth and Pornography in Australia – Evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects. The Australia Institute 2003
- Regulating Youth Access to Pornography – The Australia Institute. 2003
- Media Code of Conduct working Group on Body Image. 2007
- Consuming Innocence - Popular Culture and Our Children. Associate Professor Dr Karen Brooks. 2008
- A Report tracking Australian Children’s concern’s about Childhood – Joe Tucci. Janise Mitchell. Chris Goddard. 2006
- The portrayal of Women in Outdoor advertising. 2002

- Faking It – Women’s Forum Australia 2007
- Sex in Public: Women, Outdoor Advertising and Public Policy – Lauren Rosewarne

In relation to the individual responses to the KF2BK submission.

At no point do the respondents, apart from one, acknowledge that a growing body of international research now demonstrates the harmful impacts of premature sexualisation of children. An increasing number of child development experts have also spoken of their concerns about the mental health impacts on children of early sexualisation.

The respondents also seem to have no desire to explore their possible role in the sexualisation of children.

I acknowledge that at least Bras N things decision to review the way their products are packaged is at least one step in the right direction.

The defensive, self-serving arguments show little understanding of the issues of direct and indirect sexualisation of children.

Holeproof

The fact that Holeproof had ‘mothers of young girls’ develop the Love Kylie Princess range, does not make the items less of an issue.

Clearly there are also many parents who do not understand the full implications and impacts of the premature sexualisation of children.

It was my assertion that one set of bra and undies in the collection was skimpy and highly sexualised. (see images below)

These comments were supported by a range of child development experts, quoted in The Herald Sun last year:

Adolescent psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg criticised Minogue for lending her name to the range.

“I’m really disappointed that she is associating herself with what represents in my view this ongoing campaign to erode childhood.”

Australian Childhood Foundation CEO Dr Joe Tucci said companies were not thinking enough about the implications of marketing such products to young girls.

‘It’s not helpful for children’s development to be exposed to essentially adult concepts at a young age, especially when kids aren’t developmentally able to understand what it all means.’

Parenting educator Michael Grose said children were being forced to grow up too fast.

“It’s taking kids out of their childhood far earlier that they are ready and far earlier than their body tells them.”

‘Racy wear for kids under fire’. Carla Danaher. Herald Sun 16/6/07

The Herald Sun editorial of the same day stated:

“Little girls should dress up like princesses, not down like sex kittens in the Kylie Minogue mould.

That, regrettably is what a new range of children’s underwear has been putting in front of them.

Most parents will have issues enough with a range that includes glittering bras and high cut briefs for eight –year-olds.

Until yesterday, though, girls registering for the Love Kylie Princess Club went via a site spruiking sexy, racy, bad girl fun.

Faced with outrage, the manufacturers have detuned that site. They should now go further by reviewing their marketing strategies and their product range.

Sexualising children is deplorable, as the name behind the range knows. After all, Kylie Minogue is also the face of the UK society for the prevention of cruelty to Children.”



Target

Target does not seem to consider the fact that many young girls have grown out of their children's underwear section by the time they are 9 – 11 years. There may certainly be some girls who still fit into the children's section till older, however, all young girls should be considered in a family store environment.

Many people would regard the 'adult' section of Target's underwear as the general underwear section. There is no specific division for young adolescents.



Kids Free 2B Kids agrees that parents need to educate their children about wearing garments that are suitable for their children's age.

It is important to acknowledge that young adolescents are likely to be shopping without close parental supervision on occasions.

Target states – 'this range takes into account the sizing of the majority of adult Australian women, and not young teens.'

Anecdotally, KF2BK can inform Target that most young teens would certainly fit into this underwear range, as it begins in the small size 8 – upwards.

Again, this issue is about understanding that a) Australian parents have an increasing frustration with the premature sexualisation of young girls, boys and adolescents, b) **a truly responsible corporate world would confer with child development experts to understand the implications and impacts of their marketing and merchandising.**

Kittens School of Striptease

Regarding the Kittens 'School of Striptease' bus advertisement – It is important to consider 'context'.

The manager draws a comparison of the image (below) to a woman lying on a beach in a bikini.

Whilst most people would consider it highly unusual behaviour and inappropriate for a woman to lay on the beach in a sexualised pose in a pair of shiny high heeled stilettos, this comparison is contradicted by the claim that the woman in this image is advertising the School of Striptease's 'product and services'. These 'product and services' are dedicated to the objectification and use of women for sexual gratification and have

nothing to do with normal, non-commercialized behaviour of women. (ie not in the context of fashion parades or car races).



Regarding various other counter claims raised, we cannot take current figures of complaints sent into the ASB or traffic flow data as a true indication of prevailing community attitudes. The statement by the manager, that the image ‘falls in line with similar advertising by other companies’ is one of the very reasons the senate inquiry is taking place.

Advanced Medical Institute



The CEO of AMI’s defense about billboards marketing products for men’s erection and premature ejaculation issues is predictable
AMI continually puts the onus on parents who they claim *‘feel discomfort... driving with a child and being confronted by that child with a question about the message on the sign’*.
and
“Each parent bears the responsibility of what they do and don’t tell their children – however it is not just cause for advertisers to remove all advertising relating to sex because parents don’t wish to answer questions raised by their young’
(ASB Complaint ref No 20/07)

The CEO also suggests that the rates of teenage pregnancy are the result of lack of parent ability to discuss sex with their children.

The question is **not** whether parents do or don't feel comfortable discussing sex with their children. (Which anecdotally, Kf2bK has found is not the case). The question is:
Are children being harmed or negatively impacted in some way by these ads?

Focusing on the parents is a deflection of the issue.

Child development experts agree that children do not need to be asking questions about male sexual dysfunction long before they have even fully understood their own slowly and naturally emerging sexuality.

Further comment by KF2BK.

Sprite



Recent determination by ASB

The advertiser said:

The campaign has been designed to appeal to our target audience of 18 to 24 year olds. It is an irreverent and humorous campaign that highlights unspoken truths relevant to the target audience.

KF2BK says:

Billboards are in the public domain and the community has no choice about what they are subjected to. The target audience for the Sprite billboard may well be 18 to 24 year olds, but what about consideration for children and young adolescents who will also see the billboard– where is the accountability to them?

The ASB said:

The Board viewed the advertisement and considered the pose of the woman to be so ridiculous that it was an obvious and clever use of self-referential humour.

The Board also felt that the image was actually mocking inappropriate use of sex, sexuality and nudity in advertising.

The Board further considered that the image was appropriate for the target audience.

KF2bK says:

If it's appropriate for the target audience, what about the audience that isn't targeted but who will see the ad?

If this billboard was distributed to 18-24 year old only, then the issue would not be the same.

However, this is not the case and there is a blatant disregard from the ASB and the advertiser to consider the impact on children and young adolescents from such indiscriminate visibility.

'Irreverent and humorous' are terms often used by advertisers to excuse inappropriate campaigns. It would seem that the ASB is providing a loophole for advertisers by permitting the inappropriate use of sex and sexuality, by determining its use to be 'mockery'.

KF2bK believes this determination shows that self regulation is not adequate in protecting the welfare of children, who in this case are highly unlikely to be aware of any irony.

Anecdotally, not one person asked to comment on this billboard advertisement either in Australia or internationally, has seen it as irreverent or humorous.

Bratz Dolls.

Quotes from Bratz creator Isaac Larian.

"I love the toy business because it has such sex appeal," Larian says. "It's like getting hooked on drugs."

Hair-Pulling In The Dollhouse

Bratz toys have produced explosive growth for Isaac Larian -- and woes for Mattel

By Christopher Palmeri in Los Angeles

Business week (USA) MAY 2, 2005

"We are not making a deliberate effort to sexualise these dolls," insists Lui Domingo. "We are making them fashionable, and coincidentally the fashions these days are rather sexy." "As soon as you put a sexy outfit on a doll, all of a sudden it's inappropriate," adds Paula Treantafelles.

Besides, Isaac Larian is smart enough to see the PR benefits of a little controversy. "You know, it's always adults who make these claims about sexualisation," he says. "Ask the kids, and they don't say they like Bratz because they're sexy. It's because they're fashionable."

His warm, gentle expression suddenly becomes one of utter determination. "We're going to make toys that the kids like, not the parents," he says. "They're the customers. The world has changed."

(The Times, London, December 4 2004)

Interestingly in the submission from MGA ‘renowned consumer psychologist Dr Bryan Young’ is quoted as saying ‘Parents are *always* uncomfortable with their children’s emergent sexuality.’

The statement ‘always’ is a typical assumption, and again puts the focus on the parents and deflects from the question - **is this harming the child in any way?**

Advertising Standards Board

Quotes from Board members: (from *Ad Standard News*)

*‘In my opinion the two biggest issues facing the board at the moment involve the **alleged sexualisation of children in advertising**, and the promotion of junk food.*

*As a new mother, I feel that **certain sections of the public are unnecessarily obsessed with the former** and that certain sections of the advertising community are worryingly *laissez faire* about the latter.’*

Emma Tom – Board Member since 2003.

KF2BK wonders if child development experts come under ‘certain sections of the community?’

‘I think one of the board’s significant challenges is that we must deal with the expectations of parents who think we should be the arbiters of good & bad taste. While the board aim to reflect community standards in making it’s decisions, our considerations are done in the context of the advertisers code of ethics & issues relating to race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability & political belief.

The board cannot assume some kind of parental role & try to make decisions based on what’s good & bad for children.’

John Konrads. Board Member since 1998

‘...In addition, some people are unfamiliar with the code(s) by which we are bound when assessing complaints!

Contrary to what appears to be the perception for some, we cannot uphold a complaint that does not offend the code, but is simply in (what some people believe to be) poor taste’.

Julia Carland. Board Member since 2004 (Not current)

‘It’s not about taste; it’s about risk to children.’

Dr Emma Rush.

Jean Kilbourne, EdD

Jean Kilbourne is internationally recognized for her pioneering work on alcohol and tobacco advertising and the image of women in advertising. She is the author of *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel* and the creator of several award-winning films, including the *Killing Us Softly: Advertising's Image of Women* series.

Her new book *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and How Parents Can Protect Their Kids* written with Diane Levin, will be out in September.

She is a visiting Research Scholar at the Wellesley Center for Women. (Boston)

I recently presented '*Corporate Sleaze & Community Complacency – waking up Australia*' at the *Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood* Annual Summit on the sexualisation of Children, in Boston.

I included a selection of the images presented in the KF2BK submission.

'I thought I was way beyond being shocked by anything after my 30 years of research on media images -- but many of your images shocked me. It seems the situation in Australia might be even more dire than it is here in the U.S.'

Jean Kilbourne.

Kf2bK believes the codes need to be in line with the concern of child development experts.

Kids Free 2B Kids is not affiliated with any religious or political parties.