

## Media and the Sexualisation of Children

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## The problem(s): American Psychological Association

- Sexualization occurs when
  - a [child]'s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics;
  - a [child] is held to a physical standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy;
  - a [child] is sexually objectified, that is, made into a thing for others' sexual use, rather than a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or
  - sexuality is inappropriately imposed on a [child].



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## The problem(s): media and industry practices



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Exposure of children to aspects of adult sexuality they can't understand (or don't need to)



[Using children as vehicles for ribald humour]



## 'Sex sells' to children

- Selling to children at all
- Fostering insecurity as to appearance, linking to trappings of adult sexuality
- And/or strong focus on appearance and sexuality as source of girls' power in society
- Objectifying girls (including to themselves)
- Normalising the place of sexual trappings in children's lives



## The consequences (also by APA)

- **Cognitive and Emotional Consequences:** undermine confidence in and comfort with her own body, leading to emotional and self-image problems (shame, anxiety)
- **Mental and Physical Health:** eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression/depressed mood.
- **Sexual Development:** negative consequences on girls' ability to develop a healthy sexual self-image.

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### Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts

The sexualisation of children in the contemporary media environment ... including:

- 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 [industry Codes].

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## Revised AANA Code on Advertising to Children

- Released shortly before submissions closed on Senate Inquiry
- New provision purporting to deal with 'sexualisation'

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## Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children, s 2.4

**Sexualisation**  
 Advertising or Marketing Communications to Children:

- (a) must not include sexual imagery in contravention of Prevailing Community Standards;
- (b) must not state or imply that Children are sexual beings and that ownership or enjoyment of a Product will enhance their sexuality.

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## Advertising (etc) to Children =

Communications which

- having regard to the theme, visuals and language used, are directed primarily to Children and
- are for goods, services and/or facilities which are targeted toward and have principal appeal to Children.

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## Prevailing Community Standards =

- the community standards determined by the Advertising Standards Board as those prevailing at the relevant time, and based on research carried out on behalf of the Advertising Standards Board as it sees fit, in relation to Advertising or Marketing Communications to Children.



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## ACCM submission and the final product

- Children should not be carelessly exposed to "representation of teen and adult sexuality in advertising" at times and in environments where they have every right to be
- Children should not be directly portrayed in sexualised ways

### Sexualisation

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## Outcome of Senate inquiry

- 13 recommendations
  - Recognition of complexity of definition
- 'This is a community responsibility which demands action by society. In particular, the onus is on broadcasters, publishers, advertisers, retailers and manufacturers to take account of these community concerns.'  
(Recommendation 1)



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## Other recommendations

2. Major longitudinal study
3. Change to CTS scheduling requirement
4. Broadcasters review classification of music videos
5. Dedicated children's channels
6. Reader advice on magazines
7. Review effectiveness of operation of new AANA Code in 18 months



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## Other recommendations cont

8. Industry complaints clearing house
9. ASB produce half-yearly list of complaints regarding children
10. ASB consider pre-vetting
11. ASB formal process of community consultation
12. ASB rigorously apply standards to outdoor ads
13. Sex education in schools



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## And meanwhile ...

- Government response
    - noted most recommendations
    - mouthed industry line on video clips
    - 'sex education should be implemented in consultation with the school community; be respectful of religious and philosophical views; and be age appropriate'
- ie everything that advertising is not!
- New (draft) TV Code does nothing about video clips



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## What's missing?

- Any kind of direct government intervention
- Remember 'the onus is on broadcasters, publishers, advertisers, retailers and manufacturers'
- government not counted as part of 'society' whose action is demanded



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## Case study: the AMI billboards

- Held not in breach, then in breach
- Meanwhile, massive campaign following Senate report
- Undertaking to take down following breach finding
- Added 'censored' instead
- And now 'Making Love? Do it ... Longer!'



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## What the government could do

- NOTE: need to define issue clearly before proceeding
- Changes to State legislation
- Changes to *Children's Television Standards*
- Changes to *Broadcasting Services Act*
- Changes to *Classification Act*
- Changes to *Trade Practices Act*



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## Changes to State legislation

- No constitutional constraints
- Need to avoid 'inconsistency' with Commonwealth legislation
- Can experiment more boldly?



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## Children's Television Standards

- Easier than change to legislation
- BUT
- TV only
  - Currently allow 'Hogster' ads (over and over and over ...)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qP-z2n0nTmA>
  - So far, apply only during C programming
  - Low ratings
  - Children watch far more prime-time sitcoms, soaps, reality shows etc



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## *Broadcasting Services Act*

- Licence conditions etc
  - Compare existing on tobacco, political advertising
- BUT
- Still only electronic media
  - Need strong watchdog



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## *Classification Act*

- Covers films, magazines
  - Indirect effect on TV
- BUT
- Problem with intellectual roots: prudery and moralism, not child development and sex equality
  - Message easily undermined by marketing
  - AND need consent of all States to change



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## *Trade Practices Act*

- Applies to commercial activity by corporations
- Conceptual underpinning is consumer protection
- Can get to products themselves, not just advertising
- Compare s 52: 'No corporation shall, in trade or commerce, engage in conduct that is misleading or deceptive or is likely to mislead or deceive.'



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## Some possible examples

- 'No corporation shall, in trade or commerce, engage in conduct that is likely to expose children to inappropriate sexual content.'
- '... that places children in a position of appearing to be sexually alluring.'
- '... that links children's wellbeing to the trappings of adult sexuality.'



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Thank you



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