

**Submission to the Health and Community Services Committee's
Sexually explicit outdoor advertising inquiry
by Family Planning Queensland**

1 June 2013

Family Planning Queensland (FPQ) has been the leading provider of sexual and reproductive health and education services throughout Queensland since 1972. Based in 9 centres from Cairns to Bundaberg, Townsville to the Gold Coast, FPQ delivers health services, outreach, training and education.

FPQ provides health care along with tools and knowledge for adults, children and young people to make informed decisions to stay healthy, safe and informed.

This submission is based on current research and our unique experience working with the community for the sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing of children and young people.

FPQ welcomes the inquiry and debate on this issue.

INTRODUCTION

Children are exposed to messages about sexuality and relationships every day from TV, music, magazines, advertising and the internet. They also receive messages and information about sexuality from many other sources including their peers, family and school (Brennan and Graham, 2012). This learning is a lifelong process and an important part of their development.

Messages related to sexuality can be both positive and negative. This happens regardless of their parents', teachers' or community's intentions. Trying to eliminate the presence of all sexual messages in advertising is an unrealistic approach and without merit.

DEFINITIONS

With regards to the Inquiry into sexually explicit outdoor advertising, FPQ believes that what is meant by the terms sexually explicit and sexualisation needs to be explored further. The difference between sexuality, sexual development, sexually appropriate as well as sexually degrading or sexually inappropriate need to be more fully explored and understood, particularly in light of the fact that messages regarding healthy sexual development may be important in public health campaigns to convey health prevention and promotion messages. Those images and slogans regarded as not appropriate for viewing by all ages, especially children and young people, are more aptly linked to those that place children in a position of appearing to be sexually alluring or that link children's wellbeing to that of adult sexuality and sexual expressions.

FPQ believes that the application of a holistic, community based approach to help counter the negative and stereotyped messages delivered through advertising would be beneficial alongside provisions that no outdoor advertising or corporations as such, shall, in trade or commerce, engage in conduct that is likely to expose children to inappropriate content. As previously mentioned, the definition of inappropriate content needs to be more clearly articulated and measured. This definitional work should be completed in consultation with consumers, public health, education and sexual development experts, and children's rights advocates.

PROTECTING CHILDREN THROUGH BETTER EDUCATION

FPQ uses the term 'sexuality and relationships education' rather than 'sex education' because sexuality is not limited to genital behaviour or intercourse. Sexuality encompasses sexual behaviour, gender identity, sexual orientation and relationships (SH&FPA, 2006).

Children who receive comprehensive age-appropriate sexuality and relationships education from early childhood are better equipped to deal with the sometimes negative and stereotyped messages from the media and advertising industries. As such, we believe that the foundation for promoting healthy sexual development should be through comprehensive sexuality and relationships education.

FPQ's position is that parents and carers should be the main providers of sexuality and relationships education for children. Teachers can assist and parents and schools can work together to promote healthy attitudes and sexual development (FPQ, 2007).

To do this effectively, carers, teachers, schools and the community at large need to be supported through the provision of well-researched, evidence-based programs and resource materials. The delivery of sexuality and relationships education in Queensland and across Australia is varied. FPQ estimates that only a small percentage of school children receive sexuality and relationships education delivered consistently throughout their school years.

FPQ supports the community in this through a range of programs for young people, schools, parents and professionals to provide a range of services to the children and young people of Queensland.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Children who receive age appropriate sexuality and relationships education from early childhood are better equipped to deal with the sometimes negative, exploitative, degrading and stereotyped messages from the media and advertising industries. It is vital that parents, carers and teachers work to develop critical and analytical skills in children at a young age so that they can interpret messages appropriately.

FPQ recommends:

- Advertising should not be sexually explicit or demeaning and have any innate adverse impacts on children
- Advertising should not place children in a position of appearing to be sexually alluring or link children's wellbeing to that of adult sexuality and sexual expressions.
- To assess this, as with television and movies, advertising should be regulated by a body comprised of a diverse range of people, including consumers, public health, education and sexual development experts, and children's rights advocates, including people from all walks of life who can ensure informed debate and definitions of appropriate outdoor advertising.

In addition, FPQ recommends a range of education and support interventions, however any intervention strategy should include a variety of programs. These should include but are not limited to the following:

- comprehensive evidence based sexuality and relationships education programs for all school children tailored to specific age groups
- critical literacy programs that teach and strengthen the analytical skills of children and young people in their consumption of media and advertising
- parent and carer support and awareness raising programs about critical analysis of media, advertising and messages
- teacher support programs for developing their capacity in teaching and developing critical literacy skills of children and young people

- collaborative programs which bring together the media and advertising industry, with government and nongovernment organisations, such as FPQ, for the development of more effective interventions

CONCLUSION

If we are to address the effects of what messages children receive through the media and advertising industries, it is important that the lack of current school-based sexuality and relationships education is addressed.

The American Psychological Association in their study makes the point that “extensive analyses documenting the sexualisation of girls...is yet to be conducted” and that “research documenting the pervasiveness and influence of such products and portrayals is sorely needed.” If regulatory interventions are to be recommended by this Inquiry, then comprehensive research in this area needs to be undertaken as a first step. This evidence should then contribute to the development of sexuality and relationships education programs for children and young people, and training programs to assist parents, carers and other professionals, to deliver an age-appropriate curriculum that will enhance children’s healthy sexual development.

These interventions would need to stand alongside the development of a code that clearly defines what types of content would be deemed appropriate and inappropriate. The censorship of any imagery or text that can be deemed sexual without regard to its purpose needs to be explored more fully especially in regard to public health campaigns. A clear distinction must be drawn between advertising which depicts children as sexually alluring and advertising which does not depict children, but which uses explicit images or concepts.

REFERENCES

Brennan, H. and Graham, J. (2012). *Is this normal? Understanding your child’s sexual behaviour*. Brisbane: FPQ.

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