



Our **Mission** is to stop child sexual assault in our society.
Our **Vision** is to make Australia the safest place in the world to raise a child.



23rd June, 2013

The Research Director
Health and Community Services Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000
E-mail: hcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee:

Bravehearts Inc would like to submit the attached position statement in response to the current Inquiry into sexually explicit outdoor advertising.

The issue of sexually explicit advertising and its impact on children and young people is of great concern to Bravehearts. We have also attached a copy of our position paper relating to the sexualisation of children.

We would welcome the opportunity to consult with the Committee and to speak at the public hearing.

We look forward to your response. Please do not hesitate to contact us on 07 5552 3000 or research@bravehearts.org.au

Warm Regards



Hetty Johnston
Founder & Executive Director



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Bravehearts Position Statement



Billboard Advertising and Sexualised Images

The sexualised images of young girls and women are used extensively in mass media, advertising and entertainment mediums. The hyper-sexualisation and objectification of young girls as well as the hyper-masculinisation of boys perpetuate and reinforce each other as unrealistic ideals and can have devastating consequences on their psycho-sexual development.

Advertising is a medium that is used extensively to promote a product or service. The purpose of billboard advertising is that it is designed to attract attention and placed in a location where it is highly visible. As with other forms of advertising an individual is unable to 'turn it off' or 'turn it down' and is therefore considered intrusive and unavoidable.

The Australian Senate¹ & ² and the House of Representatives³ have conducted enquiries into sexualisation of children in media billboard advertising and provided the industry with recommendations with no effective result. The WA Government found in their Submission on the Regulation of Billboard and Outdoor Advertising that inappropriate sexualisation of children in advertising is on the increase and of a real concern. Most Government recommendations support all billboard or public advertising should carry a 'G'rating.

The regulation of advertising on billboards is covered by the advertising industry through self regulation and with very little impact. Complainants advise that it can take months for a complaint lodged with the Advertising Standards Board to be resolved and the advertiser is not legally or legislatively bound to accommodate any decision made by them.

All of the mentioned Government Enquiries have provided recommendations for the billboard advertising industry to introduce more control and regulation but to date it appears the Advertising Standards Board is nothing more than a 'toothless tiger' advocating on behalf of advertisers. Their Code for Advertising & Marketing Communications to Children is flimsy to say the least and provides very little direction.

¹ Commonwealth Parliament, Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communication and the Arts, Inquiry into Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media (2008)

² Commonwealth Parliament, Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, Review of the National Classification Scheme: Achieving the right balance (June 2011)

³ Commonwealth Parliament, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, Report of an Inquiry into Regulation of Billboard and Outdoor Advertising (July 2011)

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A report commission by the UK Government on the sexualisation of young people⁴ found the psychological impact on young people can distort their perception as to what is socially acceptable. The report provided an evidential link between those who have been exposed to 'sexual callousness' and hyper-sexualisation and objectification of both genders to violence. Numerous reports expound the effect of sexually objectifying either gender and how it can contribute to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, low self-esteem, depressive affect, and even physical health problems in high-school-aged girls and in young women⁵ Prolonged exposure to this imagery could increase the likelihood of an individual consuming material that depicts images that can be classified as harmful or sexual behaviours which could be classified as extreme.

At the far end of the scale of female and male hyper-sexualisation, masculinisation and objectification there is child sexual abuse. The depiction of a young child dressed provocatively as an adolescent is an open invitation for exploitation by predators.

Bravehearts recognises the right of advertisers to promote their products providing they are aware that the viewing audience is diverse in age.

Sexual curiosity is a normal feature of childhood and we need to provide children with the tools to deal with sexual content safely and successfully. This would mean that all forms of advertising mediums need to be presented to children in a realistic format, with non-exploitative representations of gender and sexuality which will ensure that they develop a healthy emotional and sexual reference that is pivotal to gender equality.

Bravehearts believes that it is now time for the community to demand that there is a legislative requirement and regulation for the classification of billboard advertising that will meet community and social expectations. Pressure needs to be placed on Australian Federal Government and State Governments to impose reforms and we look to you, the community for support. You have the power to make the Government enforce these regulations and ask that you ring your local, State and Federal representatives to voice your concern.

⁴ <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/sexualisation%20of%20young%20people%20review.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf>

Bravehearts Position Statement



Bold Billboard: the advertisement seen from Beaudesert Road at the Salisbury overpass. Source: Quest Newspapers



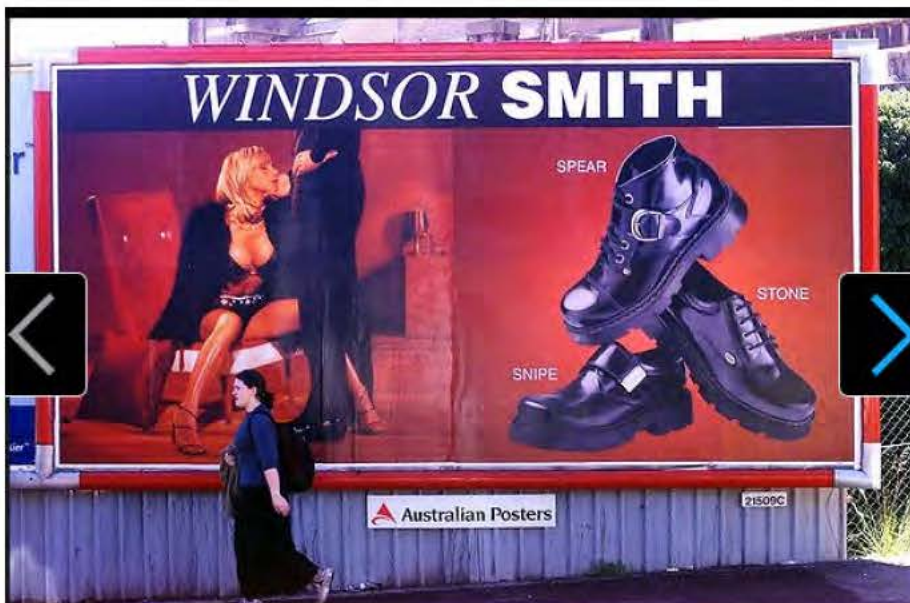
The "Want longer lasting sex?" billboards were ordered to be taken down by the Advertising Standards Bureau in 2008
<http://www.news.com.au/business/the-most-complained-about-ads-of-the-past-decade/story-e6frfm1i-1226240748206#ixzz2Mtt7nnT3>

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<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/photogallery/queensland/controversial-billboards-you-be-the-judge-20111011-1lj39.html?selectedImage=0>



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The Sexpo billboard on Brisbane Street at Dinmore

Read more: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/sexpo-billboard-too-sexy-for-ipswich-20100203-nbiw.html#ixzz2Mu1FMIYv>

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Position Paper

The Sexualisation of Children in Australia



2008

About the Authors

Carol Ronken is Bravehearts' Research and Policy Development Manager. After seven years at Griffith University as a casual staff member and Associate Lecturer in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Carol joined Bravehearts in early 2003. Carol has a Bachelor of Arts (psychology) and Masters in Applied Sociology (social research). In 2011 she received an award from the Queensland Police Service Child Protection and Investigation Unit for her contribution to child protection. Carol has also co-authored *The Bravehearts Toolbox for Practitioners working with Child Sexual Assault* (Australian Academic Press, 2011).

Hetty Johnston is Founder and Executive Director of Bravehearts Inc. Hetty is the author of the national awareness campaign, "White Balloon Day", the "Sexual Assault Disclosure Scheme", the "Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure!" child protection CD-Rom and her autobiography, "In the best interests of the child" (2004). In 2005, Hetty was announced as a finalist for the 2006 Australian of the Year Awards – she is the recipient of two Australian Lawyers Alliance Civil Justice Awards (2003, 2004) and was named a finalist in the 2008 Suncorp Queenslander of the Year Awards. She was awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship in 2010 and is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Community Practice and Governance (March 2010). In early 2009, Hetty was recognised as one of approximately 70 outstanding leaders throughout the world, receiving the prestigious annual Toastmasters International Communication and Leadership award.

This research paper has been prepared by:

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About Bravehearts Inc.

Founded in 1997 by Hetty Johnston, Bravehearts Inc. has evolved into an organisation whose purpose is to provide therapeutic, support and advocacy services to survivors of child sexual assault. We are also actively involved in education, prevention, early intervention and research programs relating to child sexual assault.

Bravehearts operates from our Head Office on the Gold Coast, advocating and lobbying nationally, with branches across the country.

The work of Bravehearts in the community includes:

- **The Ditto® Suite of Programs:** Includes *Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure* - CD ROM and Ditto's in-school protective behaviours education program.
- **Research:** Bravehearts is actively involved in research and policy development that prevents, responds to and ultimately reduces the incidence of child sexual assault.
- **Lobbying and Campaigning:** Bravehearts advocates for survivors directly and more broadly, through participation in State and Commonwealth government committees, inquiries and working parties, media, community debate and legislative review and reform.
- **Bravehearts Online:** Our online partnerships with Google and YouTube, together with our presence on other social networking sites such as Facebook, provides for the sharing of information, advice and support directly to young people and those who care for them.
- **Practitioner Workshops:** Bravehearts provides a suite of workshops tailored to provide specialist professional development education to therapists.
- **Supporting Hands:** This program provides valuable and effective training and awareness workshops on risk management for staff and volunteers in organisations that have contact with children, including teachers.
- **Community Awareness Campaigns:** Now partially funded by the Commonwealth Government, National White Balloon Day® is our signature awareness campaign. Held annually since 1997 in September during Child Protection Week Visit: www.whiteballoonday.com.au
- **Risk Audit:** Bravehearts provides a specialised Physical and Policy Risk Management Audit service for community groups, sporting clubs, retail and commercial sites that engage with children.
- **Counselling and Support Programs:** We provide counselling and support to children, adolescents and adult survivors of child sexual assault, as well as their family members.
- **Sexual Assault Disclosure Scheme:** SADS successfully encourages survivors to overcome the barriers to disclosure and as such, protects thousands of children from those who, through SADS, become known predators.
- **Telephone Crisis and Advocacy:** Bravehearts currently provides a Freecall 1800 BRAVE 1 (1800 272 831) crisis-support and advocacy line. We receive more than 80 phone calls each week from people who need timely accurate advice, assistance or referral in times of crisis.



Abstract

The following is a copy of Bravehearts' submission to the *Senate Inquiry into the Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media Environment*

The issue of the sexualisation of children has been of major concern to Bravehearts for some time. The proliferation of sexual images and sexual content in popular culture has dangerously expanded into children's merchandise and advertising.

This submission considers each of the three areas under the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry.

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The Sources of Sexualisation of Children

For a long time the adage “sex sells” has been common place in the marketing industry. While this is an accepted strategy in terms of targeting adults, there has been a disturbing trend that has seen this message move over to marketing to children. Over a number of years there has been an increased sexualisation of children in the media and an increased acceptance of this as the norm by those in the industry. There appears to be a desensitisation that has occurred, with those working in the media normalising the sexual imagery ever present in various aspects of our popular and media culture.

Marketers have recognised children and young people as a profitable market, estimated at more than \$10billion (Rush & La Nauze, 2006 “Letting Children be Children”). The “tween” market has emerged as a lucrative target for advertisers, where children’s need for social inclusion and their desire to identify with older children has been exploited to make money and sell products. This phenomenon of ‘age compression’ (the idea that children grow older younger) has led to campaigns centring on making children feel older and more sophisticated in order to capture the market.

The popular culture that is grooming children as sexualised beings permeates all aspects of the media:

Advertising:

There are two major issues here: the use of young girls to model adult clothes and the sexualisation of young girls in advertising children’s products.

There has been an explosion of sexualisation of children in advertising with the fashion industry using younger and younger models to sell clothes to adult women. Just this month (April 2008) the Australian Fashion Week organisers backed down after complaints that 14 year old girl was to be the face of the event. They have since revised their industry policy to ensure that all models participating in the event must be at least 16 years of age. Employing children to model adult clothes and portraying these young girls as women is irresponsible.

In addition, as discussed in Rush and La Nauze’s (2006) “Corporate Paedophilia” report, the images of children marketing children’s wear, particularly young girls, are portraying children as adults. Children are being posed to emphasise their ‘maturity’ and sexuality: averted eyes, vulnerable facial expressions and body positioning.

Clothing and cosmetics:

Children tend to want to be more mature and sophisticated and when they see their idols dressing in a certain way they want to mimic them. In response to this, clothing companies are marketing clearly adult clothing to children: bra and underwear sets,

g-string underwear, provocative clothing and clothing with inappropriate, sexually suggestive slogans.

While makeup has been available for young girls for many years, there has been a shift in the marketing and presentation of these products. No longer seen as “fun” accessories, these items are being marketed to children to make them glamorous and sexy.

Toys:

While there continues to be problems with gender stereotyping in toys marketed to boys and girls, the increasing sexual messages that are being communicated to young girls in the dolls marketed to them is adding a new dimension.

Barbie dolls, originally marketed at six to ten year olds are now appealing to three to six year olds and highly sexualised dolls such as the Bratz and MyScene dolls are at the forefront of a trend that promotes stereotyped and sexualised images. With fishnet stockings, tight fitting clothes, high heels, heavily made up faces and large pouty lips, these dolls are being marketed to the tweens.

While manufacturers of these dolls argue that they are merely “fashion-forward” or “cool” and that it is adults who are seeing the dolls as sexual, these dolls are clearly promoting a sexual image and sexual behaviour that is beyond the understanding of young children. They make the way the bodies look a focus of play and equate self-worth with physical appearance, a confusing message that makes it difficult for children to negotiate the transition to adulthood. It is worrisome when dolls designed specifically for four to eight year olds are associated with such objectified adult sexuality.

Magazines and popular culture:

There is a general sexualisation of popular culture that has seen the embedding of sexual content in every aspect of our society. The exposure of children to these images and messages is clearly inappropriate and dangerous.

The content of music video and the lyrics to songs is increasingly sexual and increasingly available to young children. Music videos, television programs and movies marketed at the teen demographic are realistically being seen by younger children who wish to identify with their older peers.

With fashion and gossip magazines now targeted to girls as young as 5 years of age, there is an ever-increasing pressure for children to focus on topics that they are developmentally unable to understand. Magazines aimed at young children discuss who is “hot” (including adult male celebrities) and give information on relationships, make-up, dress codes, hairstyles and advice on the opposite sex.

Donahoo (2007, "Idolising Children") found that by six years of age, a high percentage of young girls expressed the desire to be thinner, with media influences emerging as a significant predictor of this age groups dissatisfaction with their appearance and their low self-worth.

The beneficiaries of the premature sexualisation of children in the media are the product manufacturers. As discussed in "Letting Children be Children" (2006) the tween market is worth billions of dollars and advertisers are taking advantage of children's desire to want to be older.

While marketers argue that children in today's world are growing up in a different environment to that of their parents and that they are "savvier" at younger ages, it is completely irresponsible of marketers to promote children beginning to see being "sexy" as an important aspect of their lives. As discussed below, the risk of this is enormous to children both in the short and long term. Adult ideals should not be imposed on young children. Instead, marketing to children should reflect positive healthy lifestyles and show realistic images of what it is to be a child..



Evidence on the short- and long-term effects

The erosion of the boundaries between childhood and adulthood has been observed over the past years. The decreasing delineation is often discussed as children 'today' are seen as growing up too soon. While our children do not necessarily understand the sexual undertones of the clothes and images they desire and are focussed on just being cool or fashionable, older people around them do pick up on the sexual messages.

Children, and particularly girls, are under increasing pressure by advertisers and marketers to adopt a 'sexy' persona from very young ages. The impact of this sexualisation of childhood needs much greater study, however the potential effects have certainly been observed:

Psychological effects and body issues

The issue of children learning about sex at a young age is not as much the issue as the messages our sexualised culture is teaching them. Children's perceptions about what it means to be a boy or a girls and their gradual and appropriate developing sense of sexuality is being defined by the representations promoted through media.

The emphasis on appearance and being the "ideal" at a young age brings on the "agonies of adolescence" much earlier. The focus on physical appearance, being sexy and attracting attention for how they look is encouraging the notion that an individuals' self-worth and value is defined by meeting the "sexualised ideal" presented to them. This leads to an association between media representations and the increasing presence of body issues and eating disorders being seen amongst our young.

As an impact from the focus on image and how they "should look" children are struggling to "be older". Australian children are increasingly suffering from stress, anxiety, lower self-esteem, increased self-objectification, lower satisfaction with their lives and poorer relationships with others.

It has been observed that the developmental period known as "middle childhood" (about 6-11 yrs old) is critical to children developing a sense of self and self-esteem. Children of this age are beginning to understand their place in the world and are forming a sense of their own competence and the kinds of activities that are important. If children perceive "sexy" as important and their cognitive development around self becomes distorted and can impact long-term.

Violence, exploitation and vulnerability to sexual assault

One of the major concerns of the sexualisation of children in the media is that it normalises the notion of children as sexual beings and in effect gives out the message that children are “interested in and ready for sex”. The obvious resulting risk is the increased vulnerability of children and young people to sexual assault or sexualised behaviours before they are able to understand the potential consequences.

Making children vulnerable to this type of attention is clearly not appropriate; however, if we continue to bombard our children with sexualised images and culture as the norm and as desirable, we can only expect our children will find themselves facing increased social pressures to exhibit sexualised images and behaviours themselves.



Responding to the Problem

Advertisers argue that it is the responsibility of parents to set boundaries with their children and decide what products they buy, however this task is impossible with parents pitted against peer pressure and the millions of dollars of marketing targeted to their children. It is unrealistic to expect parents to stop the sexualisation of children by just saying no. As any parent knows it is not that simple. Peer friendships take on much greater importance in middle childhood and the pressure to conform is keenly felt by children. The sexualisation of children should be tackled at its source, the advertisers and marketers who are seeking to create ever-younger consumers for their products.

There needs to be an holistic approach to the problem of the sexualisation of children in the media and its effects:

Industry regulation:

The industry is currently self-regulated with two relevant codes under the Australian Association of National Advertisers. Neither code directly focuses on the sexualisation of children. The AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics says advertisements should comply with Commonwealth law and should ensure “sensitivity to the relevant audience”. The AANA Code for Advertising to Children makes no reference to sex or sexualisation.

We note that on the 16th April 2008 the AANA has announced changes to the Code for Advertising to Children, specifically the inclusion of regulations “which rule out the sexualisation of children – classed as anyone aged 14 or under – in advertising which is published or broadcast in any form”. In addition the code will state that “advertising to children must not include sexual imagery that breaches community standards, or imply that children are sexual beings”.

We wish to stress that while this is an obvious step forward, it is worrying that the AANA has defined children as 14 and under. In relation to the issue of sex, State and Territory legislation defines the age of consent at 16 or 17. We would advocate that the AANA regulations around childhood sexualisation should be in line with these definitions. We simply should not be sexualising young people who are legally under the age of consent.

Clearly tighter regulation in regards to advertising to children and “tween” market and tougher restrictions on the content in magazines is urgently needed. However, relying on self-regulation won’t work. The market is driven by creating consumers and meeting consumer needs. There must be tighter and enforceable regulatory codes.

It is essential that a regulatory code clearly sets out the minimum industry standards for how children are portrayed and for the marketing of products to children. These

standards should be developed along with community members and appropriately qualified childhood experts.

In addition we need to encourage advertising and media professionals to develop strategies that will help in their role in reducing the sexualisation of children.

One of the key things here is social responsibility – advertisers and other media need to be aware that the products they produce and images associated with them have an impact and it's not always a good impact.

National regulatory oversight system:

A national regulatory system to oversee media exposure and advertising to children and young teens needs to be established.

We would certainly advocate for a National Children's Commissioner, whose role would encompass oversight of marketing practices and media content.

The role of education:

Educating children in decoding the messages from advertising and media generally is a vital step in empowering children as informed media and product consumers. "Media literacy" is a critical component of counteracting and minimising the impact of the messages and images popular culture and the media inundate children with.

There is a need for wide-spread education for children, parents and the community which includes information on the negative impact of media images of children and the effects of sexualising childhood.