

**Submission  
No 24**

## **SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**Organisation:** The Wilberforce Foundation  
**Name:** Mr/Ms F C Brohier  
**Date Received:** 5/02/2016

**IN THE MATTER**

**OF AN INQUIRY INTO SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE BY THE NEW SOUTH WALES PARLIAMENTARY JOINT  
COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (INQUIRY)**

**SUBMISSION OF THE WILBERFORCE FOUNDATION**

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### *Introduction and Executive Summary*

1. The Wilberforce Foundation is a coalition of lawyers committed to the preservation and advancement of common law values, rights and freedoms. We speak of course on behalf of the Wilberforce Foundation, and not as representatives of our respective institutions, firms or chambers.
2. The Wilberforce Foundation proffers this submission to the Inquiry.
3. The Wilberforce Foundation submits that the sexualisation of children and young people continues to occur in New South Wales (**NSW**) and Australia. It is promoted by commercial interests<sup>1</sup> and by those in academia who argue that sexualisation of children and young people is useful and part of a child's rights.<sup>2</sup> However, it is detrimental to children and young people and to society as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Further, it is expressly contrary to the sentiments of the Parliament and people of NSW as stated in section 14 of the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 (ACYPA)*.
4. The harmful philosophy pressed by some academics referred to above has informed part of the Safe Schools program (**Safe Schools**). Consequently young children, in school and under the cover of a program they are encouraged to trust are exposed to or at least are given the links to be exposed to highly sexualised material and material involving adults.<sup>4</sup>
5. The Inquiry is therefore timely.
6. The Wilberforce Foundation recommends that:
  - a. That the Children's Advocate be resourced so there could be a division specifically devoted to monitoring and reporting to the Committee on Children and Young People (**Committee**) on material (wherever it is found) which is considered to sexualise children and young people;
  - b. That the Minister<sup>5</sup> liaise with the responsible Federal Minister to establish an office Children's media regulation which would be charged with overseeing children's interests across the media spectrum;

<sup>1</sup>Rush E and La Nauze *Corporate Paedophilia Sexualisation of Children in Australia*- The Australia Institute Discussion Paper Number 90 October 2006 ISSN 1322-5421.

<sup>2</sup>Deevia Bhana Childhood sexuality and rights in the context of HIV/AIDS *Culture, Health & Sexuality* Volume 9, Issue 3, 2007 pp. 309-324

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13691050601116686> accessed 29 January 2016;

Daniel Marshall After All, It Is Not the Child Who Believes in Something Called Development *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Volume 12, Number 2, 2006 pp. 341-344.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Psychological Society Sexualisation of Girls

<http://www.psychology.org.au/community/public-interest/sexualisation/> accessed 29 January 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Safe Schools refers students to the Minus 18 website which contains articles such as "When are you ready to do it? <https://minus18.org.au/index.php/sex-love/item/109-doing-it> accessed 1/02/2016 and which provides links to sites with expressly sexual content such as <http://www.scarleteen.com/> accessed 1/02/2016. The Safe Schools booklet "Stand Out" says: "Try accessing the website minus18.org.au, safeschoolscoalition.org.au or some of the groups listed at the back of this guide." (p18, Stand Out). Safe Schools material also directly provides material with links to adult sites <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au/uploads/41786dc83c65fe280bf3e6728d66cc4b.pdf> accessed 1/02/2016.

<sup>5</sup> The Minister responsible for the ACYPA.

- c. That parents be informed and empowered to take steps to object to material wherever it is found that, in their view, sexualises their children and that schools must respect parental rights to object to their children being exposed to such material;
- d. That in relation to the Safe Schools program:
  - i. The material (and especially the supporting material provided with the program) be reviewed by the Committee and the Children's Advocate and that the Committee report to the Minister and Parliament that content which tends to sexualise children and young people and that such material be excluded from Safe Schools;
  - ii. That parents be advised by each school as to the content of Safe Schools and that they be given access to links to allow each parent to view the material that is presented to their children;
  - iii. That Safe Schools be made an "opt-in" or at least an "opt out" program so that parents have the right to control that which their children are exposed.

### *Definitions*

7. In this submission "child" and "young person" have the same meaning as in the ACYPA that is a child is a person under the age of 12 years and a young person is a person between 12 and 25 years of age. "Sexualisation" is used in the sense of the American Psychological Association definition of sexualisation, that is:

"There are several components to sexualisation, and these set it apart from healthy sexuality.

Sexualisation occurs when

- 1) a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics;
- 2) a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy;
- 3) a person is sexually objectified — that is, made into a thing for others' sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or
- 4) sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person."

All four conditions need not be present; any one is an indication of sexualisation. The fourth condition (the inappropriate imposition of sexuality) is especially relevant to children. Anyone (girls, boys, men, and women) can be sexualized. But when children are imbued with adult sexuality, it is often imposed upon them rather than chosen by them."<sup>6</sup>

### *The sexualisation of children and young people in electronic, print and social media and marketing;*

8. The sexualisation of children continues to grow in Australia and NSW through magazines, advertising television programs like teen soap operas, music video programs<sup>7</sup> and as referred to above in the Safe Schools program.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report.aspx> accessed 1/02/2016.

<sup>7</sup> Rush E La Nauze *Letting Children by Children-Stopping the sexualisation of children in Australia* – The Australian Institute Discussion Paper Number 93 December 2006 ISSN 1322-5421.

9. Currently there is a petition circulating via change.org about Napoleon Perdis Cosmetics marketing which says:

"I would like to see this kind of sex-obsessed imagery and language removed from cosmetic companies whose audiences include young girls/women. The world already exploits the sexualisation of women to make bucks; let's be the start of changing that."

On the morning of Thursday 21st January I received a regular email from one of my subscriptions, Napoleon Perdis Cosmetics. The subject title read, "Unleash your inner sex-kitten".

Reading the email I found more references to "quickies", "steamy" and "sexy" (with a corresponding picture) with regards to Valentines' Day makeup applications. It's bad enough that we live in an overly sex-obsessed culture, displaying semi-pornographic imagery in advertisements, determined to convince everyone that women are only sexual beings; resulting in unrealistic expectations placed upon them. This leads to boys and, eventually, men expecting women to look and be sexual in ways that are just unrealistic.

I'm all for people looking and feeling fabulous - but this is a cosmetics brand adored and revered by girls as young as pre-teen (think 8-12), and they definitely should NOT be receiving emails encouraging 'sexiness'. They are still technically children for goodness' sake.

This is totally inappropriate language and visualisation for young and impressionable girls to be reading into. Girls should not have to grow up expecting to have to be sexy all the time in order to feel beautiful and accepted by society. There is a big difference in feeling beautiful and feeling sexy - and we should encourage girls toward the former, not the latter.

I would like to see this kind of sex-obsessed imagery and language removed from cosmetic companies whose audiences include young girls/women. The world already exploits the sexualisation of women to make bucks; let's be the start of changing that."<sup>8</sup>

10. The concerns of this petitioner are reflective of the concern in the community.

Collective Shout a grass roots movement dedicated to dealing with the sexualisation of young girls and women reflects this concern.<sup>9</sup>

11. The recent report to the United Kingdom Parliament "Letting the Children be Children"<sup>10</sup> sets out the many areas in which sexualisation occurs and the concerns of parents. The Report says:

"Nearly nine out of 10 parents surveyed for this Review agreed with the statement that 'these days children are under pressure to grow up too quickly' (TNS Omnibus survey, 2011). This confirms what many parents, politicians, academics and commentators have suspected for some time that this is a widely held concern of parents that needs to be taken seriously.

This pressure on children to grow up takes two different but related forms: the pressure to take part in a sexualised life before they are ready to do so; and the commercial pressure to consume the vast range of goods and services that are available to children and young people of all ages."

12. Undoubtedly the same issues are prevalent in NSW.

*The exposure of children and young people in NSW to sexualised images and content in public places, electronic, print and social media and marketing;*

13. The exposure of children and young people in NSW to such images are as discussed above. Rush and La Nauze say:

"As discussed at length in *Corporate Paedophilia*, the most significant sources of premature sexualisation are girls' magazines and advertising material. Television programs, in particular music

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.change.org/p/napoleon-perdis-cosmetics-marketing-napoleon-perdis-teen-girls-are-not-sex-kittens?tk=5clH6DzN\\_IYynqj1jAh-ior6p1weG85RRCsEHOqo9J8&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=signature\\_receipt&utm\\_campaign=new\\_signature](https://www.change.org/p/napoleon-perdis-cosmetics-marketing-napoleon-perdis-teen-girls-are-not-sex-kittens?tk=5clH6DzN_IYynqj1jAh-ior6p1weG85RRCsEHOqo9J8&utm_medium=email&utm_source=signature_receipt&utm_campaign=new_signature) accessed 1/02/2106.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.collectiveshout.org/> accessed 1/02/2106.

<sup>10</sup> Reg Bailey - Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood

Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education by Command of Her Majesty June 2011 ISBN: 9780101807821 www.official-documents.gov.uk

video programs, teen soap operas like *The O.C.* and reality television shows such as *Big Brother* also play a role.

Each month twenty per cent of six-year-old girls and almost half of ten- and eleven year-old girls read at least one of the most popular girls' magazines – *Barbie Magazine*, *Total Girl* and *Disney Girl*. These magazines teach their young readers to dance in sexually provocative ways, to idolise highly sexualised young women such as Paris Hilton, Jessica Simpson and Lindsay Lohan, and to have crushes on adult male celebrities – all while they are still in primary school.

Children are unavoidably exposed to heavily sexualised outdoor advertising as well as to some television advertising. On average, children aged five to eleven watch approximately 20 hours of television or videos each week (ABS 2003, p. 32). Most outdoor and television advertising sexualises adults, but children pick up the message that being sexy is the way to be successful and feel good about oneself.

In some cases, advertising directly sexualises children. Examples include a Renault television commercial that showed a pre-pubescent boy admiring an adult woman's legs through the Renault's sunroof, and an Ingham's chicken nuggets television commercial that showed a young boy and girl kissing furtively on the couch, in the manner of older teenagers about to make out, when the supervising parent left the room.<sup>11</sup>

14. The exposure of children in the supposed safety of the schoolroom in a program directly sanctioned by the school, that is aspects of the Safe Schools program is an aspect of exposure in a public place which the Wilberforce Foundation submits is both a cause of significant concern and an opportunity for action which the NSW Parliament can take effectively and decisively, as the program is in government control.
15. Some of the concerning aspects have been highlighted above. Others include information in relation to chest binding for girls,<sup>12</sup> and penis tucking for boys.<sup>13</sup>
16. While the provision of this information may be explained as assisting children who have questions in relation to their gender, it is scientifically flawed,<sup>14</sup> is presented in a careless and trivialising manner and inevitably sexualises children in a way which may lead to great damage to them.

*The impact on children and young people of growing up in a sexualised culture*

17. Rush and la Nauze say:

“Premature sexualisation carries a range of risks for children.

The capacity of children to develop healthy body image and self-esteem is compromised by pressure to look like miniature adults. One particularly alarming manifestation of this is an apparent trend for young people to be hospitalised for severe eating disorders at younger ages, in an ironic twist on the childhood obesity issue.

Children's general sexual and emotional development can be affected by exposure to advertising and marketing that is saturated with sexualised images and themes. To the degree that children focus on sexualising themselves rather than pursuing other more age-appropriate developmental activities, all aspects of their development may be affected.

<sup>11</sup> *Letting Children by Children-Stopping the sexualisation of children in Australia-* note 7 supra page 5.

<sup>12</sup> <https://minus18.org.au/index.php/resources/sexuality-info/item/441-how-to-bind-your-chest> accessed 1/02/2016.

<sup>13</sup> <https://minus18.org.au/index.php/resource-packs/omg-i-m-trans> accessed 1/02/2016.

<sup>14</sup> Transgenderism: A Pathogenic Meme, June 10th, 2015 <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/06/15145/> accessed 1/02/2016.

The sexualisation of children also risks normalising and possibly encouraging paedophilic sexual desire for children.”<sup>15</sup>

18. In *Corporate Paedophilia* the same authors argued that sexualisation may lead to the initiation of sexual behaviour at any early age before children have proper knowledge of the consequences. They note that early sexual activity is linked to a higher incidence of unwanted sex and the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases. They also argue that the sexualisation of children could play a role in “the grooming of children for paedophiles –preparing children for sex with older teenagers and adults...the representation of children ...playing sexual roles sends a message to paedophiles that children are sexually available.”<sup>16</sup>
19. The same concerns may be expressed about the Safe Schools program especially in that it provides children and young people to links to adult sexual websites and expressly glamorizes sex with older people.<sup>17</sup>
20. The damage to children and young people of exposure to pornography is well documented.<sup>18</sup> The upcoming conference at the University of NSW “Pornography and harms to children and young people” will address the harms in a multi-disciplinary way. The “symposium will examine the growing body of global evidence on the harmful impacts of early exposure to internet pornography and explore public policy responses.”<sup>19</sup>
21. The sexualisation of children and young people may be a direct route to leading to experimentation with pornography to their hurt. The links that Safe Schools provides to school children include links which lead to sites with pornographic images.
22. The encouragement provided to children in the Minus 18 website to self-mutilation (chest binding and penis tucking) may well expose school authorities to liability claims as, in certain circumstances, should a school child suffer damage from following or as a result of, the information available on Minus 18’s website in relation to the above matters, a school authority may be liable in negligence for any damage suffered.

*Adequacy of current measures at state and federal level to regulate sexualised imagery in electronic, print and social media and marketing, and effectiveness of self-regulation measures*

23. The Australian Association of National Advertisers Code for Advertising & Marketing Communications to Children clause 2.4 deals with sexualisation and says: “Advertising or Marketing Communications to Children:
  - (a) must not employ sexual appeal;
  - (b) must not include sexual imagery in contravention of Prevailing Community Standards; and

<sup>15</sup> *Letting Children by Children-Stopping the sexualisation of children in Australia-* note supra pages 5 and 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Corporate Paedophilia* note 1 supra p.5.

<sup>17</sup> <https://minus18.org.au/index.php/resources/minustv/item/373-virginity> accessed 1/02/2016.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.collectiveshout.org/interview\\_with\\_melinda\\_tankard\\_reist\\_on\\_how\\_porn\\_harms\\_young\\_people](http://www.collectiveshout.org/interview_with_melinda_tankard_reist_on_how_porn_harms_young_people) accessed 1/02/2016.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

(c) must not state or imply that Children are sexual beings and that ownership or enjoyment of a Product will enhance their sexuality.”<sup>20</sup>

24. The Code is commendable but as the issues discussed above and experience show it is at times honoured in the breach.
25. Other codes of conduct for television and radio exist,<sup>21</sup> but the move to sexualisation continues.
26. In relation to Safe Schools the NSW internet filtering blocks many sites.<sup>22</sup> However, the links provided by Safe Schools may allow students to access such sites. The information may also encourage students to breach the Education Department Guidelines which say “Students will never send or publish sexually explicit or sexually suggestive material or correspondence.”<sup>23</sup>

*Measures to assist parents in fulfilling their responsibility to protect and educate children;*

27. The Wilberforce Foundation respectfully submits that proper implementation of such measures is critical to dealing with the sexualisation of children.
28. Some measures that may be considered are:
  - a. **“Making it easier for parents to block adult and age-restricted material from the internet:** To provide a consistent level of protection across all media, as a matter of urgency, the internet industry should ensure that customers must make an active choice over what sort of content they want to allow their children to access;”<sup>24</sup>
  - b. **“Raising parental awareness of marketing and advertising techniques.** Industry and regulators should work together to improve parental awareness of marketing and advertising techniques and of advertising regulation and complaints processes and to promote industry best practice;”<sup>25</sup>
  - c. **“Making it easier for parents to express their views to businesses about goods and services.** All businesses that market goods or services to children should have a one-click link to their complaints service from their home page, clearly labelled ‘complaints’.”<sup>26</sup>
  - d. **That parents be advised by each school as to the content of Safe Schools and be given access to links** to allow each parent to view the material that is presented to their children;
  - e. **That Safe Schools be made an “opt-in” or at least an “opt out” program** so that parents have the right to control that which their children are exposed.

*Measures to educate children and young people and assist them in navigating the contemporary cultural environment*

<sup>20</sup> <http://aana.com.au/content/uploads/2014/05/AANA-Code-For-Marketing-Advertising-Communications-To-Children.pdf> accessed 1/02/2106.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.acma.gov.au/theACMA/ACMAi/Investigation-reports/Television-investigations/television-operationsabc-tv-investigations> accessed 1/02/2016.

<sup>22</sup> <http://sts.sydneyr.det.nsw.edu.au/files/learningsystems/filtering.pdf> accessed 1/02/2016.

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/general\\_man/general/accep\\_use/PD20020046.shtml](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/general_man/general/accep_use/PD20020046.shtml) accessed 1/02/2016.

<sup>24</sup> *Letting the Children be Children* note 10 *supra* p.15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



29. Education in relation to sexual matters should be balanced so that children are not given an unrealistic and glamorised view of sexuality and sexual expression but are taught the benefits of chastity and monogamy. This will include the teaching of the health risks of early sexual debut.<sup>27</sup>
30. Children should be empowered to refuse be sexualised in image or conduct. Instead of messages like ““Unless your parents walk in on you two on top of each other (more talk about that later) you’re going to be fine,”<sup>28</sup> they should be taught the benefits of retaining innocence and sexual purity.

*Possible measures that the Children’s Advocate can take to assist children and young people to navigate the cultural environment successfully.*

31. Rush and La Nauze suggest that:

“An all-encompassing office of media regulation could include a division with the primary responsibility of protecting children’s interests in the contemporary media environment. With oversight of all media modes, the children’s division would be well aware of the wide range of sexualising material to which children are exposed on a daily basis. The case-by-case approach currently used by media regulators is inadequate. Children rarely suffer harm as a result of exposure to a single case of sexualising material. Rather, harm is caused by cumulative exposure to sexualising material from a range of sources.”<sup>29</sup>

32. A variant of this suggestion may be undertaken by the Children’s Advocate. Accordingly the Wilberforce Foundation suggests that that the Children’s Advocate be resourced so there could be a division specifically devoted to monitoring and reporting to the Committee on material (wherever it is found) which is considered to sexualise children and young people.
33. We further suggest that that the Minister liaise with the responsible Federal Minister to establish an office Children’s media regulation which would be charged with overseeing children’s interests across the media spectrum

*Any other related matter*

34. In relation to Safe Schools, because of the matters raised at [4] and [15] *supra* that Safe Schools material (and especially the supporting material provided with the program) be reviewed by the Committee and the Children’s Advocate and that the Committee report to the Minister and Parliament that content which tends to sexualise children and young people be excluded from Safe Schools.

*Conclusion*

35. The Wilberforce Foundation thanks the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission in relation to this important issue and stands ready to attend and make oral submissions if needed.

Dated 4 February 2016.

<sup>27</sup> See [18] *supra*.

<sup>28</sup> <https://minus18.org.au/index.php/resources/sexuality-info/item/446-dating-on-the-down-low> accessed 1/02/2016.

<sup>29</sup> *Letting Children be Children* note 7 *supra* p.6.

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