

**Submission  
No 15**

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

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**Date Received:** 4/02/2016



Parliament of NSW  
Committee on Children and Young People  
Macquarie St  
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4 January 2016

*Collective Shout: for a world free of exploitation* welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People regarding the sexualisation of children and young people.

Collective Shout is a grassroots movement challenging the objectification of women and sexualisation of girls in the media and popular culture. We target corporations, advertisers, marketers and media that exploit the bodies of women and girls to sell products and services, and campaign to change their behaviour. More broadly we also engage in issues relating to other forms of exploitation, including the interconnected industries of pornography, prostitution, and trafficking.

Collective Shout commend this submission to the Committee and wish it well in its deliberation.

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On behalf of Collective Shout



Authorised by Sarah McMahon, Board Chair



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## **Collective Shout: for a world free from exploitation**

### **Submission to the Parliament of NSW Committee on Children and Young People**

#### **Inquiry into sexualisation of children and young people**

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Children and young people are growing up in a high-tech culture steeped in relentlessly sexualised, sexualising and sexist messaging from media, advertising and popular culture which conditions them from a young age to view themselves and others in terms of their appearance and sexual currency. While women and girls are primarily the subjects of hyper-sexualised media representation, these messages also play a crucial part in socialising men and boys to see the sexual objectification of women and girls as normal.

Many adults are overwhelmed by the task of protecting and equipping children as they navigate the contemporary media and social landscape. The current legislative and regulatory environment is piecemeal, confusing for the community to navigate, and tends to serve the commercial advantage of corporate and marketing interests to the detriment of the community - children and young people in particular. Despite a number of state and federal inquiries demonstrating the need for systemic reform, media classification and self-regulatory schemes have failed to halt or even slow the proliferation of imagery and messaging through electronic, print and social media and marketing that demeans women, reduces them to sexual objects, fosters a culture which condones sexual violence, and pressures young girls to act in prematurely sexual ways.

Collective Shout is critical of the self-regulatory system currently favoured in media and advertising, which allows free rein to marketers while placing the burden of action on those most at risk of exploitation and harm. In particular, we are concerned about the lack of effective incentive or enforcement to deter those who are making a profit from the sexualisation of children and young people. Media and advertising interests have had ample opportunity to hear and act on community concerns but have instead have chosen to protect their vested interests. It is time for government to step in and act on behalf of children and young people.

This is not the first inquiry into the sexualisation of children and young people in Australia. Following the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communication and the Arts in 2008 *Inquiry into the Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media Environment*, a number of relevant reviews have been held, including: the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs *Inquiry into the Regulation of Billboard and Outdoor Advertising* (2011), The Australian Law Reform Commission review of Classification – *Content Regulation and Convergent Media* (2012), The Parliament of Victoria Law Reform Committee *Inquiry into Sexting* (2013), The Senate Select Committee on *Cyber Safety Options for addressing the issue of*

sexting by minors (2013), and the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA) *Sexualisation of Children: The Commissioner for Children and Young People's 2013 Report on the Sexualisation of Children* (2014). Of numerous recommendations arising from these inquiries, it appears that none have been enacted. We hope that any positive recommendations flowing from this inquiry will not meet the same fate.

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

Children and young people globally are growing up in a high-tech culture steeped in relentlessly sexualised, sexualising and sexist media messaging which conditions them from a young age to view themselves and others in terms of their appearance and sexual currency. While women and girls are primarily the subjects of hyper-sexualised media representation, these messages also play a crucial part in socialising men and boys to see the sexual objectification of women and girls as normal.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists define the sexualisation of children and young people as:

*"The imposition of adult models of sexual behaviour and sexuality on to children and adolescents and developmentally inappropriate stages and in opposition to the healthy development of sexuality. It encompasses sexual objectification and representation of children in adult sexual ways and in ways that imply that the child's value is dependent on conforming to a particular appearance, sexual display or behaviours. Children may also experience secondary sexualisation through exposure to sexualised advertising material and products aimed at adult consumers."*<sup>1</sup>

In their ground-breaking paper *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of children in Australia*<sup>2</sup>, Dr Emma Rush and Andrea LaNauze refer to these two types of sexualisation as 'direct' and 'indirect'. In direct sexualisation, children are presented or represented in imitation of 'sexy' adults, for example a 15-page fashion photo shoot in a 2011 issue of French Vogue, which featured a ten-year-old girl in full adult makeup, high heels and high fashion while adopting suggestive poses more commonly seen among adult models.<sup>3</sup> Indirect sexualisation occurs when children and young people are exposed to images and messaging representing adult sexuality, for example when viewing outdoor advertising featuring hyper-sexualised imagery or accessing adult content online.

We feel that it is important to note that while sexually explicit media and marketing content is an important factor in carrying sexualised messaging, content which contains strong sexualising messages (such as the objectification or exploitation of women's bodies) may not necessarily be obviously sexually explicit. Jean Kilbourne, an

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<sup>1</sup>Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Position Statement #58: Sexualisation of children in contemporary media* (2008). At [http://www.wpanet.org/uploads/News-Zonal-Representatives/wpa-policy-papers-from-zone-18/ZONE%2018-RANZCP.58\\_ps-2008-pdf.pdf](http://www.wpanet.org/uploads/News-Zonal-Representatives/wpa-policy-papers-from-zone-18/ZONE%2018-RANZCP.58_ps-2008-pdf.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>The Australia Institute, *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of children in Australia* (2006).

<sup>3</sup>Melinda Tankard Reist, *10-year-old French girl sexed up for women's fashion* (2011). At <http://melindatankardreist.com/2011/08/10-year-old-french-girl-sexed-up-for-women%e2%80%99s-fashion/>

academic internationally recognised for her research on the representation of women in advertising, describes this:

*We all grow up in a culture in which women's bodies are constantly turned into things and objects. Here she's become the bottle of [beer]; in this ad she becomes part of a video game. Women's bodies are turned into things and objects. Now of course this affects female self-esteem. It also does something more insidious – it creates a climate of widespread violence against women... Women's bodies are dismembered in ads, hacked apart – just one part of the body is focused on, which of course is the most dehumanising thing you could do to someone. Everywhere we look, women's bodies have been turned into things and often just parts of things. And girls are getting the message these days so young, that they need to be impossibly beautiful. Hot, sexy, extremely thin... girls tend to feel fine about themselves until they're 8, 9, 10 years old but they hit adolescence and they hit the wall and certainly a part of this wall is this terrible emphasis on physical perfection.”<sup>4</sup>*

It is crucial to recognise, then, that images and messaging in electronic, print and social media and marketing which contribute to child sexualisation and have other adverse impacts on children and young people may not be as immediately explicit as the messages they convey. Conversely, some content which may be deemed sexually explicit (for example public health and safety messaging referring to sexual health), are not necessarily sexualising or objectifying. We urge the committee to keep these nuances in mind when identifying and defining child-appropriate content.

Also key to understanding the sexualisation of children and young people is the fact that the risks and harms of exposure to sexualising media are cumulative – it is short sighted to consider examples of hyper-sexualised content on a case-by-case basis. Children and young people are faced not with one woman-objectifying billboard or magazine here or there, but an avalanche of electronic, print and social media in both public and private spaces teaching them to see themselves and others in terms of their sexual currency. Positive messaging from parents, carers, teachers or the small proportion of constructive media is simply drowned out.

We note that previous reviews and inquiries have varied widely in their definitions of 'children' and 'young people', which has left the potential for ambiguity in both interpretation and application... Under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* (NSW) a 'child' is legally defined as a person under the age of 18, and a 'young person' is under 18 but 16 or older (i.e. 16 or 17). However, it is common when addressing the sexualisation of children for the term 'child' to be applied to persons up to the age of puberty (i.e. young infants through to primary age; often approximated at 12 years) and 'young person' to be applied to persons of between 13-18 years.

**Collective Shout recommend that the committee clearly define the terms 'child' and 'young person. We recommend that the committee approach these definitions from a developmental perspective, taking into account the way in which children mature in their ability to interpret media as well as the process of healthy sexual development and the way this is potentially impacted by their exposure to age-inappropriate sexual and sexualised material. We urge the Committee to consult with child development**

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<sup>4</sup> Jean Kilbourne, *Killing us Softly: Advertising's image of women* (documentary film, 2010). At [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTImho\\_RovY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTImho_RovY)

**and legal experts in order to include a clear and appropriate definition of 'children' and 'young people' from the outset of its Inquiry, for clarity of scope and practical application.**

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

Collective Shout notes with concern the lack of up-to-date, comprehensive Australian or NSW-specific research into media consumption and exposure among children and young people. The 2008 Senate Inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the media, recommended that research be conducted into the extent of the exposure of children and young people to sexualised media. This has been reiterated multiple times at international, federal, and state level. To our knowledge, no national research project on this subject has yet been officially commissioned or funded.

The most recent relevant Australian Bureau of Statistics report, *Australian Social Trends June 2011: Children of the Digital Revolution*<sup>5</sup> is based on data from 2006-2009, before the advent of smartphones, internet-enabled mobile devices, and many of the online media platforms which have totally transformed the contemporary media landscape. Likewise, the most recent comprehensive Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) report, *Trends in media use by children and young people* (2010) is based on 2007 Australian data and 2009 American data.<sup>6</sup> The ACMA has published more recent data in their 2013 report *Like Post Share: Young Australian's Experience of Social Media*, however the focus of this report is limited to social networking and online activities and as such fails to capture a complete picture of the intricate media lives of children and young people in Australia.

From these reports along with international research, more general trends in the media consumption of Australians, and anecdotal evidence, we are able to gain an understanding of the way in which children and young people in NSW are (or are likely to be) using or exposed to media. While television and DVD/video was the dominant form of media among Australian children and young people until the mid-2000s (average daily consumption 2 hours and 26 minutes)<sup>7</sup>, they are increasingly accessing a broad range of media content digitally. There is also evidence that the adoption of new mobile and online devices were leading to an overall increase in media consumption among children and young people.<sup>8</sup>

ACMA's 2013 data appears to bear out these trends. According to their research<sup>9</sup>:

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<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Children of the digital revolution*. At <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features60Jun+2011>

<sup>6</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Trends in media use by children and young people* (2010). At [http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/\\_assets/main/lib310665/trends\\_in\\_media\\_use\\_by\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people.pdf](http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/_assets/main/lib310665/trends_in_media_use_by_children_and_young_people.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Ibid*, p3.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Ibid*, p9.

<sup>9</sup>At <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/health-and-community/enewsletter/kids-online-statistics>

- The vast majority (95 per cent) of 8-11 year olds had accessed the internet 'in the last four weeks', with almost all having accessed the internet at some point in their lives.
- Children in this age group use multiple internet-enabled devices; up to three for a 10-11 year old (e.g. computers, laptops, mobile phones, iPads, iPods and game consoles).
- 37% of 8-9 year olds and 51% of 10-11 year olds have – at some time – accessed the internet via a handheld mobile device.
- Mobile phone 'ownership' increases significantly with age. 11% of 8-9 year olds have their own mobile phone, increasing to 67% of 12-13 year olds.
- While the majority of children access the internet at home, increasing numbers are using technology at school and at a friends' house, away from direct parental supervision.
- 45% of 8-11 year olds use social networking websites.
- The proportion of 8-9 year olds who rated the internet as 'very important' has doubled since 2009.
- Around one fifth of 8-13 year olds reported seeing or experiencing something on the internet in the last year that bothered them.

The overall picture we have of Australian children and young people is that they are tech-savvy from a very young age, have access to multiple internet-enabled devices, and use technology to access and create a wide range of media. But even in a digital age, children and young people are still exposed to significant amounts of traditional forms of media and marketing on a daily basis in both private and public spaces.

Collective Shout notes that the term 'electronic media' is somewhat unclear in an age in which an increasing majority of media content is both created and accessed digitally; we recommend that the Committee set out a more specific definition for clarity of scope. For the purposes of this submission, Collective Shout has interpreted 'electronic media' as encompassing digital or digitised media as well as media which is accessed using digital devices or platforms. The Committee's focus on 'electronic, print and social media and marketing' thereby captures a diverse range of content and platforms via which children and young people may potentially be exposed directly or indirectly to sexualised content, including but not limited to:

- Traditional print media
- Outdoor advertising
- Print advertising (including 'advertorial' content)
- Marketing strategies (e.g. sponsorship of sports teams, promotional activities and events)
- Television and video content (e.g. digital and online television broadcasting, YouTube, Apple iTunes, Netflix)
- Digitised music content (e.g. digital and online radio broadcasting, Apple iTunes, Spotify)
- Apps
- Computer and 'video' games, including internet-enabled gaming consoles/devices and multi-player interactive gaming platforms
- User-created content
- Social networking websites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)

We note with particular concern the recently announced changes<sup>10</sup> to the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice to allow the broadcast of M rated content from 7:30pm and MA 15+ content – including advertising and marketing content - from 8:30pm. Children and young people are already ambushed by the broadcasting of unsuitable promos and trailers for M and MA15+ movies, and PG content which stretches the classification guidelines, during traditional family viewing times. As well as eroding the already-poor protections offered to children and young people, we believe that this decision is likely to reinforce current trends toward the viewing of 'television' content via online media platforms as families seek to exercise control over the media consumption of children and young people.

With the proliferation of internet-enabled electronic devices and the advent of new digital media delivery platforms, the lines between various forms of media have become increasingly blurred. For example, users can access clips from many current TV shows (and in many cases the program in its entirety) via YouTube; these clips may be user-generated or uploaded by a television network as part of marketing strategy for the program. An app featuring a game may be created by an advertiser to promote a product or service; a personal Instagram account may feature clothing or products which a company has paid the user to feature in their photographs. The following case study provides a common example of the exposure of children and young people to highly sexualised media and marketing content via convergent media and platforms:

#### **Case study: The Voice Kids Australia, 2014**

*The Voice Kids Australia* is a reality talent show featuring singing contestants aged 8-14. The first season of the show screened on Channel 9 Australia-wide from June to August 2014. The show screened during the prime time Sunday night family time slot, and maintained top-ten ratings for the majority of its time on air.

During Episode 3 (6 July 2014, audience 1.255 million)<sup>11</sup> 11-year-old Sienna from Perth was featured auditioning for the show by performing the song 'Wrecking Ball', originally performed by Miley Cyrus in 2013. The video clip for 'Wrecking Ball' is infamous for its gratuitous nudity and hypersexual imagery – during the music video, then-21-year-old Cyrus (previously a worldwide child star on the Disney children's show *Hannah Montana*) is featured swinging naked on a wrecking ball and simulating fellatio on a sledgehammer. The clip is directed by Terry Richardson, a fashion photographer renowned for his pornography-referencing style.<sup>12</sup> It is available without age restriction on YouTube, where it currently has over 59 million views.<sup>13</sup>

Eleven- year-old Sienna's performance is available on YouTube, where it was uploaded by the official *The Voice Kids Australia* channel accompanied by the caption "Sienna rocked Miley Cyrus smash hit". This clip currently has nearly 4.5 million views.<sup>14</sup> We note that a YouTube search for Sienna's clip also brings up a result from *Holland The Voice Kids*, where a 14 year old girl performs the same

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<sup>10</sup> At <http://www.acma.gov.au/Industry/Broadcast/Television/TV-content-regulation/the-acma-registers-new-commercial-television-industry-code-of-practice>

<sup>11</sup> At [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Voice\\_Kids\\_\(Australia\\_season\\_1\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Voice_Kids_(Australia_season_1))

<sup>12</sup> Richardson's most recent photo shoot with Ms. Cyrus, released in November 2015, is highly explicit, featuring full frontal nudity, S&M themes, Cyrus with an oversize black dildo strapped to her body, and Cyrus fellating a police baton. It is worth pointing out that Ms. Cyrus is 22 years old, while Mr. Richardson is 50.

<sup>13</sup> At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YlCuUtkjlg>

<sup>14</sup> At [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ST\\_DioJEni4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ST_DioJEni4)

song while actually straddling a wrecking ball onstage in homage to the original Miley Cyrus video clip.<sup>15</sup>

This is the perfect storm of direct and indirect media sexualisation, and it is totally mainstream. An explicit, pornographically-influenced music video clip starring a singer massively popular among young girls; a primary-aged child performing that same song on prime-time national family television to rapturous applause and critical praise - all available digitally any time.

In this new convergent media landscape, the proliferation and globalisation of sexual imagery is of serious concern. At the same time as technology has enabled access to an unprecedented level of media across multiple convergent delivery platforms, pornographically styled representations of women and girls in electronic, print and social media and marketing have become normative. In the digital age the public, private, and digital space in which children and young people grow is wallpapered with objectified and sexualised images of women and girls.

Pornography itself is also more accessible— all that is needed to access hardcore adult content is an internet connection and a search engine:

- The average age of first exposure to pornography is 11 years<sup>16</sup>
- 70% of boys and 53.5% of girls have seen pornography by age 12<sup>17</sup>
- 100% of boys and 97% of girls have seen pornography by age 16<sup>18</sup>
- 88% of scenes in mainstream pornography contain some sort of physical or verbal aggression; 94% of that aggression is directed towards women<sup>19</sup>
- Research indicates that youth are the main consumers of pornography, with males aged 12-17 years the most frequent consumers of online pornography.<sup>20</sup> We will discuss the impacts of exposure to pornography among children and young people in our response to point 3 below.

A 2013 article in the Sydney Morning Herald on the inadvertent exposure of children to online pornography described the experiences of a number of families whose young children had accessed pornography in the family home despite the use of parental controls:

*"It was a rainy afternoon and six-year-old Lachlan was searching for his favourite cartoons on the family iPad. His search returned naked adults in strange positions. Rough positions. Lachlan didn't know he had accidentally stumbled across porn. "I want to rape you in the ass", was one of the lines delivered by a male actor. In Lachlan's mind anything related to bottoms was hilarious so he took the iPad to school to show his friends. His kindergarten friends."<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6k-8EHC304>

<sup>16</sup> *Pornography is Replacing Sex Education*, The Telegraph, 16 December 2011.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/8961010/Pornography-is-replacing-sex-education.html>

<sup>17</sup> Joan Sauer, *The Sex Lives of Australian Teenagers*. Random House, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Bridges et al, *Aggression and Sexual Behaviour in Best-Selling Pornography videos*, University of Arkansas, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Haggstrom-Nordin et al, cited in Dr Russ Pratt, *Young people's exposure to pornography* (2015). At <https://www.psychology.org.au/inpsych/2015/april/pratt>

<sup>21</sup> *Too much too soon*, Sydney Morning Herald, May 11 2013. At <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/too-much-too-soon-20131105-2wz6g.html>

In the new digital media landscape children and young people are not merely consumers, but active participants in the generation of user-created content. Sexually suggestive or explicit content is no exception - 13% of 16-17 year olds in Australia reporting having sent nude or nearly nude photographs of themselves to someone else, and 18% of 16-17 year olds report having received sexually suggestive or explicit images of someone they know.<sup>22</sup> The sharing of sexualised or explicit material between peers via text, using apps, or on social networking websites is also common, and almost impossible for many social media users to avoid unless their privacy settings are set so high as to make using the websites nearly pointless – for many users, an online friend (or even a friend of a friend) 'liking' an image is enough to bring that image up in their feed.

The digital world inhabited by children and young people, like the physical world around them, is plastered with advertising. Advertising is well known to be one of the most prevalent sources of sexist and sexualised imagery and messaging in our society and culture. The messages about women, girls and their sexual value that are having such a devastating impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people are a staple of contemporary marketing. The more we are exposed to these messages, the more they are reinforced and the more acceptable they become. In the lives of children and young people, whether they are online or in the public space, explicit and objectifying messaging is normalised – it is absorbed, internalised, and entrenched with every exposure.

Advertising in the public space (billboards, public transport exteriors and interiors, shopping centres, shopfronts, etc) is particularly pernicious, as it cannot be turned off or avoided as children and young people go about their daily lives. There is little opportunity for parental discretion or critical evaluation. The power of 'Out Of Home' (OOH) advertising is harnessed by the outdoor advertising industry, which according to the Outdoor Media Association of Australia "experienced unprecedented growth in 2014, posting a 10% overall increase on net revenue year on year"<sup>23</sup> taking the outdoor advertising industry's 2014 net revenue to \$602.1 million. The ubiquity of objectifying, sexualised, gendered and/or explicit content in OOH advertising makes it an unavoidable constant in the lives of children and young people.

Marketing is certainly not limited to explicitly 'advertising' content. Marketers will take or create almost any opportunity to promote what they are selling. In our experience, not only is what is 'for sale' frequently sexually exploitative in its own right, but children and young people are outright targets:

- **Hooters** (a chain famous for its scantily clad waitresses) sponsorship of a Gold Coast under-16s AFL club, included the attendance of waitresses as sideline cheerleaders at club games<sup>24</sup>
- **Zoo Weekly** (now-defunct, unclassified, pseudopornographic magazine featuring highly degrading and objectifying content) marketed to teenage

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<sup>22</sup> Australia Communications and Media Authority, *Like Post Share: Young Australians' experience of social media* (2013). At

<http://www.acma.gov.au/~media/mediacomms/Report/pdf/Like%20post%20share%20Young%20Australians%20experience%20of%20social%20media%20Quantitative%20research%20report.pdf> . p11.

<sup>23</sup>At <http://www.oma.org.au/facts-and-figures/industry-performance>

<sup>24</sup> *Sponsorship scandal a storm in a D-Cup*, Brisbane Times, 6 May 2010. At

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/sponsorship-scandal-a-storm-in-a-dcup-20100505-ua8v.html>

boys and sold in family venues such as supermarkets, at child's eye level and frequently among children's magazines.<sup>25</sup>

- **Div**a (a chain jewellery retailer popular with pre-teen and teenage girls) co-branding with Playboy (a global pornography empire) for a range of girl's jewellery, including 'Playmate of the Month' themed necklaces<sup>26</sup>
- **Spotlight** (a chain craft and party supply retailer) co-branding with Playboy for a range of bed linen<sup>27</sup>
- **Lance 'Buddy' Franklin** (an AFL superstar) simultaneously promoting Auskick and a range of children's AFL equipment and a range of t-shirts featuring pornographic images of young women<sup>28</sup>
- **General Pants Co** (a clothing retail chain popular with teenagers) in-store and shopfront promotion campaigns: "Sex & Fashion" campaign included underage employees wearing badges stating "I love sex"; large shop window posters depicting a semi-naked woman in the process of being stripped; "Wet Dreams" swimwear campaign featuring highly sexualised images of young women

It is plain that children and young people are living under siege from directly and indirectly sexualising media and marketing. Whether they are in the public space or in their own bedrooms using a device, connecting with their friends, playing games or even doing homework - if children and young people don't find hypersexualised media, it's only a matter of time before that content will find them.

**Collective Shout urges the Committee to commission comprehensive research to establish the extent of the exposure of children and young people in NSW to sexualising media content. However, this research should not preclude swift government action - Collective Shout stresses the importance of implementing measures to reduce or prevent the exposure of children and young people to sexualising media and marketing content on the basis of the evidence that already exists.**

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### 3. The impact on children and young people of growing up in a sexualised culture.

During the past decade there has been a number of international and Australian expert and government reports into the impacts on children of sexualising media and marketing, which we commend to the Committee, notably:

*Sexualisation of Children: The Commissioner for Children and Young People's 2013 Report on the Sexualisation of Children.* Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA), 2014.

*Inquiry into Sexting: Report of the Law Reform Committee for the Inquiry into Sexting.* Parliament of Victoria Law Reform Committee, 2013.

*Options for addressing the issue of sexting by minors.* Senate Select Committee on Cyber Safety, 2013.

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<sup>25</sup> At [http://www.collectiveshout.org/zoo\\_weekly](http://www.collectiveshout.org/zoo_weekly)

<sup>26</sup> At <http://www.collectiveshout.org/diva>

<sup>27</sup> At [http://www.collectiveshout.org/spotlight\\_pimps\\_playboy](http://www.collectiveshout.org/spotlight_pimps_playboy)

<sup>28</sup> At [http://www.collectiveshout.org/buddys\\_no\\_role\\_model](http://www.collectiveshout.org/buddys_no_role_model)

*Against Hyper-Sexualisation: A New Fight for Equality.* Parliamentary report, French Senate. Chantal Jouannou, 2012

*Letting Children Be Children: Report of an independent review of the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood.* UK Department for Education, 2011.

*Sexualisation of Young People Review.* Linda Papadopoulos, 2010.

*External research on sexualised goods aimed at children.* Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee, 2010.

*Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of girls.* Melinda Tankard Reist (ed), Spinifex Press, 2010

*Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media.* Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts, 2008.

*Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls.* American Psychological Association, 2007.

*Corporate Pedophilia: Sexualisation of children in Australia.* Emma Rush & Andrea LaNauze, 2006.

This growing body of global evidence provides us with little doubt as to the detrimental effects on children and young people of growing up in a sexualised culture. As the Australian Psychological Society told the Senate Committee Inquiry into the sexualisation of children in 2008:

*"The values implicit in sexualised images are that physical appearance and beauty are intrinsic to self-esteem and social worth, and that sexual attractiveness is a part of childhood experience... Girls learn to see and think of their bodies as objects of other's desire, to be looked at and evaluated for its appearance".<sup>29</sup>*

Not just girls, but boys also, are socialised to see the sexual objectification of women and girls as normal. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists Position Statement on Sexualisation of Children in Contemporary Media states:

*"The use of sexualised images of children and adolescents has increased in popular media over the last ten years... There is a growing body of evidence that premature exposure to adult sexual images and values has a negative impact on the psychological development of children particularly on self-esteem, body image and understanding of sexuality and relationships."<sup>30</sup>*

The developmental processes of childhood are a crucial factor in understanding the impact of sexualised media on children and young people. Children are not born with the tools to interpret media; these develop with age and appropriate adult guidance.

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<sup>29</sup> See submission 115 at

[http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ecca\\_ctfe/sexualisation\\_of\\_children/submissions/sublist.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ecca_ctfe/sexualisation_of_children/submissions/sublist.htm)

<sup>30</sup> Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Op. Cit.

Preschool-aged children in Australia are active and universal consumers of media and are considered a legitimate target for marketers, yet the facilities required to be able to distinguish between fantasy and reality do not develop until approximately 7-11 years of age.<sup>31</sup> During infancy, preschool and early primary school, children are laying down foundational concepts about themselves and the world around them which will inform lifelong attitudes and behaviour - media and cultural messages consumed in the early years has a powerful and enduring impact.

Repetition increases comprehension in young children,<sup>32</sup> meaning that sexualised content does not 'go over children's' heads' but rather reinforces and embeds sexualising messages. The harms of the exposure to children and young people to prematurely sexualising material must be considered cumulatively - one 'sexy' billboard here or there may be considered to be 'offensive' or awkward for parents to explain, but this is simply not the scenario in our culture. In NSW, indeed across Australia and the world, children and young people are exposed to thousands upon thousands of images containing sexually objectifying and degrading messaging, over many years. Each additional exposure to prematurely sexualising material imposes an ever-increasing burden on the mental and physical resources of children and young people, before they are developmentally equipped with the tools that they need to process these messages.

Identified impacts on children and young people of growing up in this sexualised culture include:

- Lack of positive body image<sup>33</sup>, body dissatisfaction, and appearance anxiety<sup>34</sup>
- The development of abnormal eating behaviours, including eating disorders<sup>35</sup>
- Negative self-image, associated with negative impact on mental wellbeing including depression and anxiety<sup>36 37</sup>
- Impaired cognitive and physical functioning<sup>38</sup>
- Impaired sexual development in adolescence<sup>39</sup>
- Poor self-protective behaviours in adolescent relationships<sup>40</sup>
- Development of models of sexual behaviour and relationships modelled on depictions of male sexuality as aggressive and girls and women as passive sexual objects<sup>41</sup>
- Broader societal consequences such as sexism, sex bias and sexist attitudes<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, *Young Children and the Media: A discussion paper* (2009). At <http://www.steinereducation.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/Young-Children-and-Media-PRINT-low-res.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>34</sup> American Psychological Association, *Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls* (2007). p21.

<sup>35</sup> Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> American Psychological Association, *Op. Cit.*, p21-27.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> American Psychological Association, *Op. Cit.*, p31.

- Increased acceptance of sexual harassment, sex role stereotypes, interpersonal violence, and adversarial sexual beliefs about relationships<sup>43</sup>
- Increased acceptance of sexual violence and sexual exploitation<sup>44</sup>

While both girls and boys are negatively impacted by growing up in a sexualised culture, research demonstrates that girls and young women bear a disproportionate burden of the consequences of hypersexualised imagery and messaging. Conforming to a culture which values girls for their sexual appeal requires an enormous amount of time and energy which girls could otherwise be investing in education, sport, family, friendships, or self-care. The 2014 Mission Australia Youth Survey revealed that body image was a 'significant concern' for 41.6% of NSW young women aged 15-19 surveyed; body image has been a leading issue of personal concern for young people for nine years in a row. The National Eating Disorders Collaboration estimates that 9% of the Australian population (predominantly girls and young women) suffer from an eating disorder; a 2014 NSW Coronial Inquest recognised eating disorders as a foundational cause of suicide among young women.<sup>45</sup> The total social and economic cost of eating disorders in Australia in 2012 was estimated at \$69.7 billion.<sup>46</sup>

In our sexualised media culture, children and young people are not merely passive consumers of sexualised media, but learn from an early age to be active participants in their own self-objectification. The social media presence of young women is living evidence of the impact of a lifetime of being barraged with messaging that their primary value is in their appearance. Presenting a 'hot' image at all times requires constant effort, and with technology at their fingertips the requirement to conform to stereotypical sexualised beauty ideals is inescapable:

- *"I would never post a photo that wasn't flattering of me. I feel anxiety over how many likes I get after I post a picture."* Michelle, 24
- *"I do feel pressured to appear a certain way... I definitely feel that I have to look as good when I go somewhere as I do on Instagram. I feel more pressure in real life."* Lindsay, 22
- *"Sometimes when I post a photo of myself, I end up taking 20 different pictures and choosing the best one. It can get depressing sometimes... because I constantly check it, it feels overwhelming."* Jordan, 22
- *"If I'm having a bad hair day or a breakout, I obviously won't take a selfie, but if I'm having a good day, looking good and feeling good, I'll show that through my Instagram photos. Also, my friends are usually very supportive of my selfies and they'll post comments that reassure me that my picture looks good."* Saeeda, 23<sup>47</sup>

The creation and sharing not just of sexualised but sexually explicit images of oneself or others – "sexting" – has also become normalised among children and young people. In their submission to the Senate Select Committee on Cyber Safety's *Options*

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p34

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>45</sup> At <http://thebutterflyfoundation.org.au/nsw-coronial-inquiry-links-eating-disorders-and-suicide/>

<sup>46</sup> At <http://www.nedc.com.au/eating-disorders-in-australia>

<sup>47</sup> All quotes from *Young women on Instagram and self-esteem: 'I absolutely feel insecure'*, The Guardian Online Australia 5 November 2015. At [www.theguardian.com/media/2015/nov/04/instagram-young-women-self-esteem-essena-oneill](http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/nov/04/instagram-young-women-self-esteem-essena-oneill)

for addressing the issue of sexting by minors (2013), the Alannah and Madeleine Foundation commented that sexting is “part of an image-sharing culture in a sexually permissive society, one in which young people see sexualised images virtually everywhere they look. It is not surprising that they create their own sexual imagery.”<sup>48</sup>

In November 2015, NSW Police revealed that they had destroyed the mobile phones of seven young people in Cootamundra as part of an underage sexting investigation, after they were found to be distributing sexually explicit images of themselves among friends. While warning of the criminal consequences of sexting, NSW Police also warned of the personal risks of sharing ‘provocative’ selfies or images of others.<sup>49</sup> Young people are subject to heightened social pressure to create or forward sexual images, and the loss of control over images can be more severe for young people.<sup>50</sup> Loss of control of an explicit ‘selfie’ can lead to anxiety, depression, becoming a victim of bullying, and even self-harm. Internationally, children aged as young as 13 have committed suicide after their sexts were circulated among peers.<sup>51</sup> There also appears to be substantial risk from adults online – a 2012 UK study revealed that of sexually explicit images of children and young people posted by themselves online, 88% of those images were subsequently taken from their original location and uploaded onto ‘parasite’ pornographic websites.<sup>52</sup>

When it comes to the sexual health and development of children and young people, there is mounting evidence that growing up in a sexualised culture can have a potentially devastating impact. Australian data is showing significant adverse trends in youth mental health, risky sexual behaviour among younger teenagers, and teenage girls reporting unwanted sex.<sup>53</sup> The Australian Crime Commission has attributed increased rates of child-on-child sexual abuse to the exposure of children to hypersexualised imagery.<sup>54</sup>

Australian teenagers also appear to be using pornography as a handbook of sex education. In Maree Crabbe and David Corlett’s groundbreaking documentary *Love & Sex in an Age of Pornography* (2013), based on interviews with 75 Australian young people, Jake, 18, says of his first sexual experience at 15:

*"First time I had sex, because I'd watched so much porn, I thought all chicks dig this, all chicks want this done to them ... all chicks love it there. So I tried all this stuff and, yeah, it turned out bad ... 'When a guy watches porn: 'that's hot, I want to try that. You, do this, this and this,' you know what I mean? And they will just keep pressuring and pressuring. I've got*

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<sup>48</sup> Senate Select Committee on Cyber Safety, *Options for addressing the issue of sexting by minors* (2013). p5.

<sup>49</sup> Police Warn of Underage Sexting Risk, Illawarra Mercury, 25 November 2015. At <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3517449/police-warn-of-underage-sexting-risk/>

<sup>50</sup> Senate Select Committee on Cyber Safety, *Op. Cit.*, p4-5.

<sup>51</sup> How a cell phone picture led to a girl's suicide, CNN Online, 7 October 2010. At <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/10/07/hope.witsells.story/>

<sup>52</sup> 'Parasite' porn sites stealing images and videos posted by teens, Sydney Morning Herald, 23 October 2012. At <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/parasite-porn-sites-stealing-images-and-videos-posted-by-teens-20121023-282bf.html>

<sup>53</sup> Patrick Parkinson, *For Kids' Sake: Repairing the Social Environment for Australian Children and Young People* (2011). p8.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.crimecommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/NIIF-PSB-REPORT-2010.pdf>

mates who do it. They will tell you, 'Yeah, she didn't want to at first but I just kept hounding her and hounding her and finally she let me ...'<sup>55</sup>

Sara, 20, says: "Girls, they love it in porn, so maybe boys think that girls like that and, you know, when you love someone, you know, you're always willing to just ... make them happy. [if] I'm in love, then I'll do it for you and I'll pretend that I like it ... And in the end ... I just became an object ..."<sup>56</sup>

Disturbingly, Australian GPs are reportedly seeing an increase in the number of teenage girls seeking treatment for injuries sustained as a result of porn-influenced sexual acts, such as tearing or fecal incontinence due to anal sex.<sup>57</sup> Recent UK research shows that nearly half of teenage girls are coerced into unwanted sexual acts.<sup>58</sup> Australian sexual violence counsellors are seeing pornographically-influenced intimate partner violence among teenagers as young as 14:

*"In the past few years we have had a huge increase in intimate partner rape of women from 14 to 80+. The biggest common denominator is consumption of porn by the offender ... We have seen a huge increase in deprivation of liberty, physical injuries, torture, drugging, filming and sharing footage without consent. I founded the centre 25 years ago and what is now considered to be the norm in 2015 is frightening."*

*-Di McLeod, director, Gold Coast Centre for Sexual Violence<sup>59</sup>*

A further risk to the wellbeing of children growing up in a sexualised culture is the erosion of boundaries around their sexual availability. At the same time as the global pornography industry has mainstreamed the fetishisation of virginity and youth, children are presented in media and marketing as sexually knowing, and groomed from infancy to model their appearance and behaviour on 'sexy' adults. As recently as November 2015, Collective Shout was made aware of a male sex toy being marketed by Chemist Warehouse, one of Australia's largest pharmacy retailers, physiologically modelled on the vagina of a young girl and described in promotional material as "tight as a virgin with a realistic hymen just waiting to be popped... this virgin is waiting to be touched for the very first time."<sup>60</sup> No child should have to grow up in a culture where adults so blatantly fail to respect the fact that children are not sexually available.

**Collective Shout urges the Committee to recognise the harms of sexualisation as a public health crisis requiring swift and decisive action on behalf of children and young people.**

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<sup>55</sup> *Overexposure is making teens pawn to porn*, The Age, 27 July 2013. At <http://www.theage.com.au/comment/overexposure-is-making-teens-pawns-to-porn-20130727-2qqvt.html#ixzz3rQotBzWw>

<sup>56</sup> Crabbe, M. and Corlette, D. *Love and Sex in an Age of Pornography* (film). Rendered Visible and Looking Glass Pictures, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> 'Boner Garage' posts a window into the world of sexualised young women online, News.Com.Au, 2 June 2015. At <http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/relationships/sex/boner-garage-posts-a-window-into-the-world-of-sexualised-young-women-online/news-story/f7d83a68c48e378027430fd8e93da349>

<sup>58</sup> *Four in 10 teenage girls 'coerced into sex acts'*, Independent Online, 11 February 2015. At <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/four-in-10-teenage-girls-coerced-into-sex-acts-10037846.html>

<sup>59</sup> Personal correspondence with Melinda Tankard Reist, 7 April 2015.

<sup>60</sup> At [http://www.collectiveshout.org/chemist\\_warehouse](http://www.collectiveshout.org/chemist_warehouse)

#### **4. 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.**

Collective Shout has long been critical of current state and federal measures to regulate sexualised imagery, in particular of media and marketing self-regulatory systems. The advertising industry and media interests have used self-regulation to their commercial advantage, to the detriment of the community, and women and girls in particular. The self-regulation model enables media and marketers to be seen as responsible while avoiding real scrutiny of a long history of irresponsible and profit-driven behaviour.

Current measures are piecemeal and confusing to navigate. There is minimal - if any - pre-vetting of content, and the various regulatory systems rely almost totally on reactive community complaints to kick-start the regulatory process. Each genre of media must be negotiated separately by consumers; many new digital media formats and platforms are not regulated at all. The Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC), in its 2012 review of media classification laws, referred to the current scheme of media classification and regulation as “analogue legislation in a digital age”<sup>61</sup>, and demonstrated that the current Australian approach to media classification “does not deal adequately with the challenges of media convergence and the volume of media content now available to Australians.”<sup>62</sup> Collective Shout echoes the ALRC’s assertion that current platform-based systems of media regulation, particularly those which rely on industry self-regulation, are a “broken concept”<sup>63</sup>, inefficient and ineffective in a convergent media environment.

It is also apparent that current approaches to the regulation of media and marketing in Australia are too narrow in regards to the consideration of their impacts on children and young people. There has been some effort to address children’s programming and advertising content in recent years, including the establishment of the dedicated digital children’s television channel ABC4KIDS, and the prohibition of the use of sexual imagery of children in advertising or marketing within the *AANA Code for Advertising and Marketing for Children*. However, these allowances have been made only in regards to media, products and marketing created for, featuring, or specifically targeting children or young people – the impacts on children and young people of exposure to media intended for an adult audience is rarely if ever considered. This ‘intent vs impact’ loophole allows regulators to disregard the fact that children cannot avoid consuming or being exposed to imagery and messaging intended for adults, for example when encountering ‘Out of Home’ advertising, or navigating the websites of television broadcasters in order to access age-appropriate content.

The Advertising Standards Board (ASB) has been widely criticised for its exploitation of the intent-vs-impact loophole in order to excuse sexualising and adult sexual content in advertising. In 2012 the President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Steve Hambleton, called for a new government inquiry into the sexualisation of children in advertising to protect the health and development of children, stating:

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<sup>61</sup> Australian Law Reform Commission Classification, *Content Regulation and Convergent Media Summary Report* (2012). p11.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p12.

*"These are highly sexualised ads that target children, and the advertising industry is getting away with it. There is strong evidence that premature sexualisation is likely to be detrimental to child health and development, particularly in the areas of body image and sexual health. The current self-regulatory approach through the Advertising Standards Bureau is failing to protect children from sexualised advertising."*<sup>64</sup>

Our website [http://www.collectiveshout.org/asb\\_fails](http://www.collectiveshout.org/asb_fails) contains a detailed and illustrated list of recent failures, some notable examples including:

- A billboard promoting a strip club and featuring a scantily clad young woman, situated outside a boys' high school and visible from classrooms. Complaints about the depiction of women and impact on child audiences were dismissed by the ASB who considered the ad to 'treat sexuality with sensitivity to the relevant audience'.<sup>65</sup>
- Shopfront advertising for a lingerie and sex toy retailer featuring a lingerie clad model and the slogan 'Nice Girls Do...' located within a major shopping centre and metres from a children's play area. Complaints about the depiction of women and impact on child audiences were dismissed by the ASB, which specifically noted concerns about the exposure of children to sexualised imagery and yet considered to 'treat the issue of sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience'.<sup>66</sup>
- Shopfront and in-store advertising for a clothing retailer popular among teenagers, featuring women in bikinis posed lying in a bathtub superimposed with the text 'Wet Dreams', and located within major shopping centres. Complaints about the depiction of women and impact on child audiences were dismissed; the ASB determined that the reference to ejaculation did not constitute obscene language, that sexuality was depicted in a way which was not exploitative or degrading, and that the ad did 'treat the issue of sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience'.<sup>67</sup>

Despite a long history of similar dismissals, and their own research finding a high level of community concern about the depiction of women in advertising and impacts on children of sexualising imagery,<sup>68</sup> the ASB claims that their decisions reflect community values and that the advertising industry in Australia has a high level of compliance with advertising codes.<sup>69</sup> This is an absurd claim in light of the fact that out of the top 10 most complained-about advertisements in 2015, only one was found to breach the Code.<sup>70</sup>

As noted, since 2008, multiple state and federal inquiries dealing with sexualisation, media regulation, and other relevant issues, have heard extensive expert evidence that children and young people in Australia are the collateral damage of a toxic mix of corporate exploitation, cultural complacency, and regulatory failure:

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<sup>64</sup> At <https://ama.com.au/media/ama-calls-new-inquiry-sexualisation-children-advertising>

<sup>65</sup> At <https://adstandards.com.au/cases/2013/cases/2013/January?ref=40/10>

<sup>66</sup> At

[http://www.collectiveshout.org/ad\\_standards\\_board\\_dismisses\\_complaints\\_against\\_honey\\_birdette\\_nice\\_girls\\_do\\_ad](http://www.collectiveshout.org/ad_standards_board_dismisses_complaints_against_honey_birdette_nice_girls_do_ad)

<sup>67</sup> At <http://ms.adstandards.com.au/cases/0390-14.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Advertising Standards Bureau, *Irk, eek, oh! & really? 40 years of self-regulation meeting community standards in Australia* (2015). P38-39.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p27.

<sup>70</sup> At <http://www.adnews.com.au/news/ad-standards-reveal-top-10-most-complained-about-ads-for-2015>

These inquiries variously identified a range of inadequacies in current measures at state and federal level to regulate sexualised imagery in media and marketing, including (but not limited to) weak codes of ethics, voluntary codes, lack of pre-vetting, inadequate monitoring, subjective and inconsistent interpretation of Codes, de-sensitisation of panel members, little to no consultation with child development experts, and lack of meaningful incentives for media outlets and marketers to change their behaviour. The complaint-based nature of regulation systems has been criticised for placing an unacceptable burden on those vulnerable to the harms of sexualised content to protect themselves against media and marketing interests. Low public knowledge about complaints processes and how to go about making a complaint, combined with slow response times and low rates of complaints being upheld, lead to disempowerment and disincentive to participate in the system.

Recommendations from these inquiries appeared promising, and Collective Shout was generally supportive of a number of proposed measures. We note the comments from Graham Perrett MP, Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, in his foreword to the report on the 2011 *Inquiry into the regulation of billboard and outdoor advertising*:

*"... the [advertising] industry has indicated that it is keen to preserve the system of self-regulation. However, if the industry does not demonstrate over the next few years that self-regulation can appropriately operate within the bounds of community expectations for appropriate outdoor advertising, then the Committee strongly recommends that the Australian Government institute regulatory measures."*

Four and a half years have passed since these comments, and the self-regulation of the advertising industry has continued to operate outside the bounds of community expectations not only in outdoor advertising but in all forms of marketing, without any government intervention. In fact, there has been an almost complete lack of meaningful action from government or industry in response to any of the findings and recommendations arising from more than a decade's worth of inquiries into the impacts of sexualising media and marketing on Australian children and young people. It is our view that the regulatory climate has not only failed to improve, but has worsened to a point where it is questionable if the interests of children and young people are of any concern at all.

Recent changes to the Free TV Code are a further example of a regulatory culture in which media interests are prioritised over community wellbeing. As discussed above, these changes will allow the broadcast of M rated programming from 7:30pm and MA rated programming from 8:30pm, undermining parents and ambushing children during traditional parent-child co-viewing times. The changes to the code also separate television broadcast content from that same content made available through online television platforms. According to the ACMA, "The new code reflects the reality that TV is operating in a new digital era in which content can be viewed from a wide variety of sources and on a wide variety of platforms".<sup>71</sup> However, only viewers who watch a program on broadcast TV are eligible to lodge a complaint about programming content – television programs that appear on an internet site, social media or an app is not covered by the Free TV code. Given that the changes

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<sup>71</sup> Media Watch, ABC, 16 November 2015. Transcript at <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s4353314.htm>

to the code were made in response to a shift in media consumption towards online viewing, it is absurd that television programming provided online by television networks is not regulated by the Code. This step opens up greater avenues for children to be exposed to sexualised content while simultaneously robbing families of the meagre means of protection offered by the complaint system.

The inadequacies in the current regulatory models of media and marketing in Australia, particularly regarding the exposure of children and young people to prematurely sexualising, objectifying and degrading content have been well and truly identified. Our website [www.collectiveshout.org.au](http://www.collectiveshout.org.au) alone is a virtual repository of the failures of media and advertising self-regulation and the blatant disregard of corporations and media for the health and wellbeing of the Australian community from whom they profit.

**Collective Shout reiterates the call of Dr Emma Rush and Andrea LaNauze in *Letting Children Be Children* for the restructuring of the current regulatory environment to bring the regulation of all media and marketing together under one encompassing independent federal regulator.<sup>72</sup> This new office of media regulation should include a division with the primary responsibility of protecting the interests of children and young people, addressing both the direct and indirect sexualisation of children in all media modes from a child-rights basis. This division should include staff with expertise in areas relevant to child development and the sexualisation of children in and by the media, and should be empowered to commission long term Australian-based research into media hypersexualisation. In addition to setting new standards and mechanisms for the protection of children and young people from sexualising imagery and messaging, this new regulatory body should provide a single complaints clearinghouse with a fast and transparent process for responding to community complaints.**

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## **5. Measures to assist parents in fulfilling their responsibility to protect and educate children.**

We hear regularly from parents and carers who feel overwhelmed by the task of helping children and young people to navigate growing up in a hypersexualised media culture. These parents are responsible, loving, and burdened with the totally unfair expectation that it is up to them to act as the gatekeepers against a tide of sexualising messaging generated by companies and media who are abrogating their corporate social responsibilities.

It is reasonable to hold parents accountable for their responsibilities to their children. However, parents are not the only ones responsible for the protection, education, and wellbeing of children and young people. As vulnerable member of our society, children rely on a wide variety of adults and institutions for the safeguarding of their right to a childhood free of prematurely sexualising influences. Collective Shout challenges the prevailing 'but what about the parents' attitude when it comes to the exposure of children to sexualising media and marketing – parents and carers do not raise children in a vacuum. The welfare and wellbeing of children and young people is not just a collective social responsibility, but one undertaken in the interest of society as a whole.

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<sup>72</sup> The Australia Institute, *Letting Children Be Children* (2006). p38.

The concept that parents are entitled to support from state and society as they fulfil their parental role and responsibility is explicitly set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified under Australian Law. According to UNICEF, under this Convention the State has a particular responsibility to protect and assist families in fulfilling their essential role as nurturers of children.<sup>73</sup>

This is particularly relevant in our culture, where the slow drip of pornified messaging has been eroding our community standards for long enough that many adults have become desensitised to the presence or impacts of sexualised media and marketing. Too frequently, parents who raise the issue of child sexualisation are dismissed as 'prudes' or accused of 'pearl clutching' and 'moral panic'. It is telling of how deeply the sex industry has embedded itself within our understanding of sexuality that criticism of the exploitation of women and girls in pornography can be met with accusations of being 'sex negative' or 'anti woman' – as if sex and womanhood itself is equated with the commercialisation of the bodies of women and girls.

In our experience, educating parents and caregivers is a very effective in helping them deal with the problem. Following our presentations in schools we regularly receive feedback from parents and teachers who had previously been unaware of the extent of sexualising media to which their children were exposed or of the risks of such exposure. A significant first step to educating and protecting children, is equipping parents with the media literacy skills they need to interpret and navigate the media-saturated world their children inhabit. Collective Shout would be happy to recommend suitable resources to the Committee.

Educating parents and caregivers is meaningless, however, in the absence of political and institutional support for the steps families take on behalf of their children. The imbalances in the current media regulatory systems, as described above, disempower parents and limit true freedom of choice in a hypersexualised media landscape. Restructuring media regulation is a key step in providing parents with adequate tools to protect and educate children and young people.

Collective Shout is supportive of the UK model of ISP-level filtering of online content, which requires all major internet service providers to block 'adult' content by default. Under these laws, adults who wish to access MA15+ or R18+ media content must satisfy rigorous age verification protocols in order to enable access to this content from their ISP. Given that many children and young people can easily override device-level safety features, this scheme provides a significant safeguard particularly when it comes to pornographic content. Additionally, such measures send a strong message at both social and corporate level that the protection of children's interests is paramount, without restricting the access of adults to legal online content.

Collective Shout is also supportive of measures to ensure that all outdoor/'out of home' (OOH) advertising and marketing occurs at a level appropriate for child audiences, for example a standard similar to the 'G' classification. The constant plastering of our public space with sexualising and objectifying content undermines parents and carers and removes their freedom of choice as they attempt to take responsibility for the media to which their children are exposed. It is hardly reasonable to expect families to invest in parental control software and the co-viewing of television when their children's trip to school may take place on public transport

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<sup>73</sup> At [http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)

'wrapped' in an advertisement for Sexpo. We urge the Committee to support parents and carers by taking steps to ensure that the public space is one in which children's freedom from harm outweighs commercial interests.

**With media literacy tools and the appropriate political and institutional supports in place, parents and carers can be empowered to raise children who have the ability to be critical consumers and creators of media. These are crucial steps in equipping parents to raise the next generation of children and young people to recognise and reject sexual exploitation.**

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

Educating children and young people about sexualised media and marketing is a crucial part of assisting them in navigating our contemporary cultural environment. With the appropriate media literacy and critical thinking skills, children and young people develop resilience and are empowered to make healthy choices as consumers of media.

While education is a useful and protective tool for children and young people, it cannot take the place of broader actions to reduce the presence and impact of sexualised media. Collective Shout is critical of approaches which accept hypersexualisation as a social norm, and rely on education measures as a kind of 'magic bullet' against potential harms. This approach to education is particularly common when it comes to the discussion of the harms of pornography. The sex industry is renowned for evading responsibility for its impact on the lives of children and young people by switching the focus from its distorted and exploitative representation of women and sexuality to vague discussions of the importance of 'education'. Children and young people deserve better than simply to be expected to learn how to consume media in a so-called 'appropriate' way while the adults surrounding them allow hypersexualised media to proliferate unfettered.

Collective Shout is also critical of industry-funded school-based education programs, such as *Dove BodyThink*.<sup>74</sup> These programs allow the very companies who are creating sexualised advertising messaging to have access to children and young people, creating brand awareness and loyalty among a new generation of customers at the same time as 'whitewashing' their corporate reputation. It is inappropriate and dangerous to entrust the companies who financially benefit from the objectification of women and girls with the task of educating children and young people about the harms of sexualisation. Collective Shout would be happy to recommend suitable resources to the Committee.

As we have discussed above with regards to parents and caregivers, while education measures are crucial to assisting children and young people navigate a sexualised media culture, education is not a substitute for effective political and institutional measures to reduce and prevent the exposure of children and young people to hypersexualised media and marketing. It is not reasonable to expect children to have to develop the resilience to protect themselves against predatory adult commercial

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<sup>74</sup> At <http://www.butterflyfoundation.org.au/bodythink-program/>

and cultural interests - education measures must take place in a context of broader reforms intended to respect and protect the wellbeing of children and young people.

**Collective Shout recommends that this inquiry examine and evaluate current school-based education programs to determine their relevance and effectiveness in educating children and young people about the harms of sexualisation. If the available resources are determined not to be suitable, we recommend consulting with experts in the field of child development, media, and sexualisation to commission a program suitable for use in NSW schools. We further recommend funding to help schools secure these resources.**

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

Under the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act (2014)*, the primary principle governing the role of the NSW Children's Advocate is to advocate for and promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people.<sup>75</sup> Given the significant risks that the sexualisation of children and young people poses to their safety, welfare and wellbeing, it is appropriate for the Children's Advocate to be involved in measures to address the issue of sexualisation in media and marketing.

Following the responsibilities of the Children's Advocate outlined in the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act (2014) Section 15: Functions of Advocate*<sup>76</sup>, Collective Shout proposes the following measures:

1. *"To promote the participation of children and young people in the making of decisions that affect their lives and to encourage government and non-government agencies to seek the participation of children and young people appropriate to their age and maturity."*

Too often, the voices of children and young people are either missing or deliberately excluded from discussions and decision-making processes regarding sexualised media and marketing. Considering how profoundly these issues impact children and young people, as well as the cultural landscape they will inhabit in adulthood, the chance for young people to speak and be heard about how media sexualisation affects their lives is vital. The Children's Advocate has the potential to ensure that children and young people are given a chance to be included it comes to decisions that are made on their behalf by both government and non-government bodies attempting to address the problem of sexualisation. This is in accordance with Section 15, Part 2(c) of the Act: "Consult with children and young people from a broad range of backgrounds and age groups throughout the State."

2. *"To conduct, promote and monitor research into issues affecting children and young people."*

As discussed above, there is an urgent need for long-term local research into the extent of the exposure of Australian children and young people to sexualised media

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<sup>75</sup> At [http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol\\_act/afcaypa2014341/s14.html](http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/afcaypa2014341/s14.html)

<sup>76</sup> At [http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol\\_act/afcaypa2014341/s15.html](http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/afcaypa2014341/s15.html)

and marketing, and the long term impacts of that exposure. The Children's Advocate is well-positioned to conduct, promote, and/or monitor such research, either independently or in partnership with researchers and organisations currently working in the field.

3. *"To promote the provision of information and advice to assist children and young people."*

As discussed in sections 5 and 6 above, children and young people, along with their parents and carers, stand to benefit greatly from being informed about media sexualisation and provided with evidence-based advice about how to navigate media and marketing in a positive and healthy way. As a trustworthy and independent source, it would be quite appropriate for the Children's Advocate to promote the provision of information and advice to assist children and young people facing issues related to sexualisation.

4. *"To prepare, in consultation with the Minister, a 3-year strategic plan for children and young people in the State."*

Collective Shout urges that this 3-year strategic plan should include a focus on the sexualisation of children and young people in NSW.

5. *"Focus on systemic issues affecting children and young people."*

Sexualisation, particularly as regards the sexual objectification of women and girls, is a systemic issue. Both sexism and disregard for children and young people are widespread, particularly among corporations however they also have deep roots in our culture. While it is true that media influences culture, it also reflects our culture back to us – the sexualisation we see in the media is to some extent a reflection of the standards we accept more generally. The Children's Advocate can play an important role in investigating, revealing, and confronting the systemic issues contributing to the sexualisation of children and young people.

6. *"Give priority to the interests and needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people."*

It is necessary to understand hypersexualisation as something which in itself renders children vulnerable and disadvantaged. In our digital, mass media age, all children are at risk of the potential harms of premature sexualisation. That noted, some children will inevitably be at greater risk of harm than others. This may range, for example, from children who experience high levels of exposure to sexualised content due to lack of adult supervision, through to children for whom exposure to sexualised media is part of wider patterns of abuse or neglect.

It is our view that the most effective way for the Children's Advocate to protect vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people from the harms of sexualisation is to lend support to the reforms and proposals we have discussed above – reducing the exposure of all children to sexualised media and marketing is of utmost priority. An additional measure would be, in consultation with child development experts, to identify the children and young people at greatest risk of harm from sexualisation in order to devise appropriate strategies to address any unique risks among particular cohorts.

7. *“Work co-operatively with other organisations that provide services to or represent the interests of children and young people.”*

Collective Shout is open to working co-operatively with the Children's Advocate to address the issue of the sexualisation of children and young people. As a grassroots organisation with many years' experience as well as extensive knowledge of current events and research, we are well-positioned to serve in a variety of capacities as appropriate.

8. *Work with industry and government to develop child rights-based framework.*

For children and young people to be respected and their points of view heard when it comes to the issue of media hypersexualisation, a fundamental shift is needed in the approach taken by industry and government when considering impacts on children. Current approaches allow media and corporate interests to essentially do as they please until they cross an agreed line; it has been clearly demonstrated that not only is this unreasonable but that it simply does not work. Instead, media and corporations should be encouraged to consider the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children as a paramount concern in all that they do. Australia has committed on an international level to the right of children to the highest possible standard of health; the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people needs to be more widely considered particularly when it comes to the impact of sexualising content. It is reasonable to expect government, business and society to take a child rights based approach in addressing the harms of sexualisation in media and marketing, however such a shift in attitude will not happen without expert guidance and advocacy. Collective Shout urges the Children's Advocate to encourage media, marketers, corporations, and government regulators to consider the rights of children and young people to be free from imposed sexualisation as a fundamental of corporate social responsibility.

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## **8. Any other related matter.**

Collective Shout notes the current high-profile national and local efforts in Australia to draw attention to and prevent family violence and violence against women and girls. We urge the Committee to remember in its deliberations that the prevalence of sexualised images of women in our society - including but not limited to imagery and messages in which violence against women is portrayed in an eroticised or sexualised manner – is a significant underlying contributor to real world violence against women and girls. It cannot be overstated how dangerous it is to continue in the pretence that the ways in which the bodies of women and girls are portrayed is disconnected from the way that the bodies of women and girls are treated.

We also note the upcoming Federal Senate inquiry into the harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the internet. As we have discussed in detail in our submission to the Committee, pornography is a significant contributor to the sexualisation of children and young people, both in and of itself and in its influence on mainstream media and marketing. We urge to Committee to consider that this Senate inquiry is likely to highlight a range of issues and expert evidence relevant to the sexualisation of children in NSW, and that recommendations arising from the Senate inquiry may be of relevance to the findings and recommendations of this Committee.