women'sforum
AUSTRALIA

Life affirming cultural change for women and girls

The Chair, National Body Image Advisory Group
5 June 2009

Dear Ms Freedman,

Submission to the National Body Image Advisory Group

Women's Forum Australia (WFA) is an independent women's think tank that undertakes research, education and public policy development about social, economic, cultural and health issues affecting women. We advocate an evidence-based approach to public policy formulation and challenge Australians to engage critically in debate about women's issues.

WFA commends the Australian Government's efforts to address the problem of body image dissatisfaction, and we appreciate the opportunity to offer a number of recommendations to the National Advisory Group. Further WFA views the Government's funding of the Butterfly Foundation to establish a National Eating Disorders Collaboration as a positive and necessary step in combating a problem that affects adults and adolescents alike.

In 2007, WFA published a research paper *Faking It: the Female Image in Young Women's Magazines*[1]*,* an analysis of the body of academic research on the impact of magazines upon young women. *Faking It* highlights a number of important conclusions about the impact of popular culture and media on young women: over time women come to see themselves as objects to be evaluated; self-objectification encourages women to objectify other women; and women's attitudes toward their own bodies are worse after looking at thin media images.

WFA believes that body dissatisfaction is not limited to dissatisfaction about body *size.* Many of the causes of body image dissatisfaction listed in the National Advisory Group's information paper can be linked to a broader cultural phenomenon: the objectification and sexualisation of women in media and advertising. A strategy to address body dissatisfaction must be then informed by an evidence base which highlights the nature and extent of objectification and sexualisation.

While magazines have been the focus of our research, WFA believes that many of the recommendations of this submission can easily be extended to other modes of media and advertising.

Yours sincerely,

Katrina George
Chair
Women's Forum Australia

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[1] Ewing, S (2007) *Faking It: the Female Image in Young Women's Magazines,* Women's Forum Australia, Adelaide.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Establish a single Code of Conduct for the advertising, media and fashion industries to regulate the portrayal of body image, similar to Option 1 of the Victorian Media Code of Conduct on Body Image Working Group. WFA recommends that this Code of Conduct must incorporate clear performance measures and incorporate a regular, independent review mechanism to ensure effectiveness of application and compliance.

WFA further recommends that the Code of Conduct address the following issues:
- models used to model women's clothing are over 16;
- models have BMIs over 18;
- broad representation in images of Australia's multicultural society;
- disclosure of digitally enhanced images;
- balanced promotion of holistic lifestyle not focussed solely on physical appearance; and
- positive editorial language.

Recommendation 2: Develop a Code of Ethical Gender Portrayal that works in conjunction with the Code of Conduct but specifically addresses the issues of:
- authority and decision-making;
- sexuality;
- violence;
- diversity; and
- language.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen the existing self-regulatory, co-regulatory and legislative systems with an emphasis on:
1. approach to complaints;
2. timeliness of investigation; and
3. greater reflection of community concerns.

Recommendation 4: Establish a single point of information provision and complaint registry for the various advertising and media codes of conduct (similar to *Advertising Standards Canada*)[2] to replace the currently confusing and complex system.

Recommendation 5:   Institute a national awards scheme which publicly acknowledges and awards media, fashion bodies and advertisers who consistently promote healthy body images. WFA recommends that an awards scheme be run in conjunction with National Body Image and Eating Disorders awareness week.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen education and curricula with an emphasis on:

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[2] http://www.adstandards.com/en/ConsumerComplaints/theConsumerComplaintsProcess.aspx. Accessed 31 May 2009.

- equipping adolescents with critical analysis and media literacy skills; and
- greater provision of information on body image and eating disorders

Part One: Recommendations

The Information Paper presented by the Australian Government's Office for Youth, outlines key issues and provides supporting information on body image. While these are helpful, WFA believes that body dissatisfaction is not limited to dissatisfaction about body *size.* Many of the causes of body image dissatisfaction listed in the National Advisory Group's information paper can be linked to a broader cultural phenomenon: the objectification and sexualisation of women in media and advertising (refer to Part Two of this submission).

WFA offers the following recommendations for inclusion into a National Strategy and development of a Code of Conduct.

Recommendation 1.   Single Code of Conduct

Women's Forum Australia supports the development of a single body image code of conduct that is applicable to the media, advertising and fashion industries. These industries have somewhat overlapping relationships and interests. Therefore it is imperative to ensure a single, consistent point of reference about body image that all parties adhere to.

For any Code of Conduct to be effective, Women's Forum Australia recommends that it incorporate:
1. **clear benchmarks or performance measures** that provide clear standards for the industries. These benchmarks could include:
   - models used to model women's clothing are over 16;
   - models have BMIs over 18;
   - broad representation in images of Australia's multicultural society;
   - disclosure of digitally enhanced images;
   - balanced promotion of holistic lifestyle not focussed solely on physical appearance; and
   - positive editorial language.

2. **periodic independent reviews** incorporated to monitor the effectiveness of the Code of Conduct across the advertising, media and fashion industries. Women's Forum Australia suggests that these reviews be conducted every 2 – 3 years, have quantitative and qualitative review bases and incorporate feedback from consumers, health experts as well as industry representatives.

Evidence for the inclusion of these concepts is provided below.

Minimum Age for Women's Clothing Models

The Model Health Inquiry, ordered by the British fashion industry has advised that "There exists strongly expressed concern that it is profoundly inappropriate that girls under 16, under the age of consent should be portrayed as adult women."[3] Panel chairwoman, Baroness Kingsmill commented that "The risk of sexualising these children was high and designers could risk charges of sexual exploitation."[4]

Healthy Body Mass Index (BMI) for all Models

The World Health Organization considers a BMI of 18 to be healthy. Models in Italy and Spain who fall under this BMI are now banned from participating in fashion shows. Similarly, London Fashion Week will ban models with a BMI below a certain level and models will have to show a health certificate before being able to walk the catwalk. WFA commends this initiative. Images of thin models tend to make women compare their bodies with these women, temporarily damaging self-esteem, making themselves self-conscious, anxious and dissatisfied with their own bodies.[5]

Broader Representation of Australia's Multicultural Society

Researchers using the results from 25 different studies concluded that, in general, women's body image was much worse after looking at thin media images than after looking at images of average size models, plus-size models, or inanimate objects.[6] In addition, at present, Indigenous, ethnic and people with a disability are underrepresented in advertising.

While Cosmopolitan admirably introduced a Body Love' policy[7], it is not consistently followed. For example, near the back of a 2007 edition, a larger size model is featured on two pages called "Style workbook: Fashion flattery fixers: 4 ways to dress slimmer"[8] This message indicates that it is not acceptable to be unique or individual. It simply re-emphasises the need for women to fit the 'thin ideal'. A broader representation of women is needed – without making specific reference to it.

Disclosure of Digitally Enhanced Images

Advertisements, despite having a practical goal of selling a real product to a real consumer, often have "low modality", that is a low level of reality. By this, they mean that advertisements often show "fantasies and daydreams rather than realities, and impossibly beautiful and glamorous supermodels rather than real people".[9] These low reality images are depicted as easy to achieve. In reality they are only achieved through digital enhancement therefore, they are deceptive and make inaccurate claims.

[3] BBC News (11 July 2007) *Girls under 16 'should not model',* United Kingdom
[4] BBC News (11 July 2007)
[5] Durkin SJ & Paxton SJ (2002), 'Predictors of vulnerability to reduced body image satisfaction and psychological wellbeing in response to exposure to idealized female media images in adolescent girls,' *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 53:995-1005
[6] Groesv, LM, Levine MP, and Murnen SK (2002) 'The effect of experimental presentation of thin media images on body satisfaction: a meta-analytic review,' *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 31:1-16
7 Wilson S, Body Love Policy, http://cosmo.ninemsn.com.au/foodandbody/bodylove.aspx, accessed June 2007.
8 Cosmopolitan (Australia), April 2007.
[9] Machin D and Van Leeuwen T (2004), 'Global media: generic homogeneity and discursive diversity,' Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies 18(1).

Balanced Promotion of Holistic Lifestyle

The feedback section of *Cleo's* June 2009 issue reported that the 'most important issue' to readers at the time was the Global Financial Crisis. Other important issues included the environment, equal pay for women and compulsory maternity leave. 32 per cent of readers also stated that they wanted more health editorials.[10] Greater inclusion of articles on issues such as these not only reduces the emphasis on self-evaluation but also informs and empowers readers.

Positive Editorial Language

In terms of editorials accompanying advertising and media, any broadcast or published material should refrain from using objectifying language. "Any comment made based on the visual evaluation of the body encourages a third-person (objectifying) versus first-person (subjective) perspective about the self, leading to negative body evaluations."[11]Negative language is often used in conjunction with the representation of thin, glamorous models. A rticles and titles using language such as "how to...hide your pimples, fade your scars..." are presented as being helpful to women. In reality, it encourages women to focus on their perceived flaws.

Performance Measures and Independent Periodic Reviews

Periodic independent reviews should be incorporated to monitor the effectiveness of the Code of Conduct across the advertising, media and fashion industries. Women's Forum Australia suggests that these reviews be conducted every 2-3 years, have quantitative and qualitative review bases, and incorporate feedback from consumers, health experts as well as industry representatives.

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[10] Cleo (June 2009) 'Honesty Policy: Your Feedback'
[11] Calogero, RM, Herbozo, S & Thompson, JK (2009) 'Complimentary Weightism: The potential costs of appearance-related commentary for women's self-objectification', *Psychology of Women Quarterly,* 33, 120-132

Recommendation 2.   Gender Portrayal Code of Ethics

Women's Forum Australia recommends the development of a Gender Portrayal Code of Ethics that, while distinct from a media/advertising/fashion industry Code of Conduct, be complimentary to this Code of Conduct.

An example of such a Code of Ethics is *Advertising Standards Canada: Gender Portrayal Guidelines*[12] which work in conjunction with the Canadian's broader Code of Conduct. This gender-based code of ethics which recognises the impact of imagery on the broader public was recommended in the Victorian Government's Report: *The Portrayal of Women in Outdoor Advertising.* (See Appendix A)

The incorporation of such a framework would assist in providing ethical guidelines to address issues that factor heavily in body image dissatisfaction. Issued addressed by the Code of Ethics include topics such as:

Authority and decision-making

Men and women continue to be unequally represented in roles of authority and decision-making. In the 1970s and 80s, magazine advertisements stereotyped women by showing them being controlled by or dependent on men. Now, women are more often shown as independent and professional.[13] But, they are shown wearing a lot less. "Cross-culturally, unequal nakedness almost always expresses power relations."[14] Significant research proves that when it comes to advertising and media, women are still portrayed as objects in positions of inferiority, subordination and low social power.[15]

Sexuality

Advertising should avoid the inappropriate use or exploitation of sexuality of women. Through dressing, posing, and Women are frequently portrayed as sexual objects.[16]*Playboy* and *Cosmopolitan* the idea that "women exist as decorative bodies to look good and sexually satisfy men."[17]

Violence

Neither sex should be portrayed as exerting domination over the other by means or overt or implied threats, or actual force. Violent behaviour for men, including its rewards, is encoded

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[12] http://www.adstandards.com/en/Standards/genderPortrayalGuidelines.aspx Accessed 31 May 2009
[13] Kang ME (1997), 'The portrayal of women's images in magazines advertisements: Goffman's gender analysis revisited,' *Sex Roles* 37:979-997
[14] Wolf, N (1991), The Beauty Myth, Vintage, London, p.13
[15] Lindner k (2004), 'Images of women in general interest and fashion magazine advertisements from 1955 to 2002,' *Sex Roles51 (7/8): 409-421*
[16] Lindner K (2004)
[17] Krassas NR, Blauwkamp JM & Wesselink P (2001), 'Boxing Helena and corseting Eunice: sexual rhetoric in *Cosmopolitan* and *Playboy* magazines,' *Sex Roles* 44 (11/12): 751-771

into mainstream advertising[18]. A muscular man in an advertisement associates dominance and control. Heroic masculinity is equated with violent masculinity.[19]

Diversity

There should be equal portrayal of age, cultural groups and sexualities. Women and men should also be portrayed as competent in a wide range of activities both inside and outside the home. Research suggests that women are encouraged to reject traditional roles in favour of independence.[20] Yet, "women (and men) respond positively to the celebration of the diversity and difference of women as people in their life experiences."[21]

Language

Language should be avoided that misrepresents, offends or excludes either gender.

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[18] Katz, j (1995) 'Advertising and the construction of violent white masculinity, In. G. Dines & J. Humez (eds.), Gender race and class in media: A text reader, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

[19][19] Katz, J (1995)

[20] Krassas NR (2001)

[21]Maddigan , J (Feb 2002) *The Portrayal of Women in Outdoor Advertising,* State of Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet Office of Women's Policy

Recommendation 3.   Strengthening of Current Systems

While the National Advisory Committee's information paper states that "Australia is already well served by a strong framework of self-regulatory, co-regulatory and legislative measures that provide guidelines for the mass media, including advertisers", there is still a need for improvement.

Any self-regulatory mechanism requires regular, empirical, independent reviews to ascertain the effectiveness of the mechanism. WFA believes that the self-regulatory models have much opportunity for further enhancing. Issues requiring further work within the current framework include:

Approach to Complaints

Currently in Australia, investigations into advertising and media are only prompted *after* a consumer takes the initiative to make a complaint to which ever body is responsible. In contrast, the UK advertising standards model[22] has a proactive approach to television, radio and advertising media. Pre-checks are carried out to ensure advertising standards are kept high. This includes checking for specific problem categories before advertisements are aired. Media owners can then agree to not run advertisements that are deemed to be in breach of code standards. WFA believes that the latter is a positive, proactive approach and should be adopted in favour of the current reactive approach in Australia.

Timeliness of Investigation

Often the time taken to review any complaint made is initiated towards the end of an advertising campaign, thus the advertiser has the ability to still run an unhealthy campaign and end it before any investigation is completed, before any finding is made.

Reflection of Community Concerns

While supposedly reflecting community perceptions, the Advertising Standards Board's own extensive consumer research commissioned late in 2007 found that "when compared to the Board, the community is more conservative in their attitude towards sex, sexuality and nudity."[23] The 2001 Report on *The Portrayal of Women in Outdoor Advertising*[24]outlined a range of community concerns about the content of outdoor advertising. In this report about the content of advertising the community called for[25]:

- a greater variety of women to be featured in advertising. 83 per cent of females and 65 per cent of males believe that there are not enough examples of women of different shapes and sizes.
- images that reflect differences in age, shape, weight, ethnicity, colour, sexual orientation and physical ability;

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[22] http://www.asa.org.uk/asa/ Accessed 4 June 2009
[23] Advertising Standard Bureau (2007) 'ASB Releases World First Research.
[24] Maddigan, J (Feb 2002) *The Portrayal of Women in Outdoor Advertising,* State of Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet Office of Women's Policy
[25] Maddigan (Feb 2002)

- more indigenous people in advertising;
- more women in non-traditional roles and occupations;
- more realistic images than artificial, stereotypical images;
- more women in leadership roles and in positions of authority, and sportswomen; and
- more images positively expressing women's contributions to family and society

Recommendation 4.   Centralised Complaint System

Australia's current advertising and regulatory system is very complex, with numerous bodies overseeing different aspects of media and advertising. Complaints mechanisms are unwieldy and difficult to understand and access by ordinary members of the public. If a consumer wanted to make a complaint about poor body image philosophies being promoted by a company in an billboard advertising campaign, or complain about a magazine's consistent use of unrealistic images, there is no 'one stop shop' which would assist the consumer through the complaints process.

This is because a range of bodies are responsible for handling complaints about advertising, media and marketing. Each body is currently accessed through different complaints making and complaints hearing processes and accountability mechanisms are inconsistent. It takes much too long to get a determination.

Recommendation 5.   National Body Image Corporate Responsibility Award

WFA recommends that the currently complex system be replaced by a one-stop complaints point for the general public, similar to *Advertising Standards Canada,*[26] ensuring that provision is made for complaints about print media or editorial content.

WFA recommends that the Australian Better Health Initiative (ABHI) implement a national awards scheme which publicly acknowledges and awards media, fashion bodies and advertisers who consistently promote healthy body images throughout their channels and campaigns. We suggest that an awards scheme be run in conjunction with National Body Image and Eating Disorders awareness week.

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[26] http://www.adstandards.com/en/ConsumerComplaints/theConsumerComplaintsProcess.aspx. Accessed 31 May 2009.

Recommendation 6.   Strengthen Education and Curricula

Women's Forum Australia supports the concept of a targeted intervention curriculum that begins with pre-teen age groups and reinforced and built upon throughout high school. WFA believes that such a program should include:

- critical analysis skills focusing on improving media literacy and discernment; and
- integration of information on body image and eating disorders

Equipping Adolescents with Critical Analysis and Media Literacy Skills

"Every time you turn around it seems someone has come up with a new drug or surgery to redesign women. Weight-loss pills, drugs to stave off ageing, cosmetic surgery, liposuction, Botox. People just can't be themselves – there's always someone who wants to intervene to enhance them – usually someone out to make money"[27] Subsequently, magazines financed by the beauty industry teach little girls that they need make-up and train them to use it, so establishing their lifelong reliance on beauty products.[28] In addition, there exists great distance between the real norms of market, the real position of women in society and the messages sent by magazines. Picture in magazines tend to be ideal, not real.[29] Ewing had concluded that 'fake and manipulated photographs…can be fun but it's when we confuse it with fact that it becomes dangerous'[30]

WFA recommends that Personal Development, Health and Physical Education programs include critical analysis of false and misleading mass advertising. Strong emphasis should be placed on the harmful influence of media on body image, when teachers select subject matter on growth and development (personal identity).

Greater provision of information on body image and eating disorders

WFA recommends the *ResponseAbility Education* initiative facilitate the integration of eating disorder promotion as a chronic illness, early intervention of negative body image and eating disorder prevention issues into secondary, primary and early childhood teacher education via the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector.

Within Personal Development, Health and Physical Education programs on personal health choices and nutrition, curricula needs to include particular provision of information on the harmful effects of binge eating, bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa.

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[27] Tankard Reist, M (2007) 'Pills for 'perfect' women', *The Courier Mail,* May 28th.
[28] Greer, G (1999), *The Whole Woman,* Doubleday Books, London, p.314
[29] Machin D & Van Leeuwen T (2004), 'Global media: generic homogeneity and discursive diversity,' *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 18 (1).
[30] Ewing (2007) pg. 20

Part Two: An Evidence Base- Objectification and Sexualisation

Body dissatisfaction is not limited to dissatisfaction about body *size.* Many of the causes of body image dissatisfaction listed in the National Advisory Group's information paper can be linked to a broader cultural phenomenon: the objectification and sexualisation of women in media and advertising.

A strategy to address body dissatisfaction must be informed by an evidence base which highlights the nature and extent of objectification and sexualisation. We offer the following highlights of the international research in to this phenomenon, documented more fully in WFA's publication *Faking It.* (full copy available on request)

Objectification Defined

Objectification can be defined as the "object-like character of an image that connotes passivity, vulnerability, property, and, in its most extreme form, victimization."[31] Objectification occurs "when a woman's body, parts of her body, or sexual capabilities are seen as her whole self, ignoring other attributes."[32] In media that *objectifies* women, women are portrayed as physical objects that can be looked at and acted upon-- and fail to portray women as subjective beings with thoughts, histories, and emotions. The objectification of women sends a cultural message that a women's worth is reduced *exclusively* to the level of her physical appeal.

Self-Objectification, Impacts and the link to Magazines

A key issue is the *role* that media messaging and images play – do they only reflect our culture, or do they shape it, at least in part? In the case of young women's magazines, do they affect women, or can women affect magazines? For body image, do magazines reflect real women and beauty, or do they create and shape the notion of cultural beauty?

Obviously women don't read magazines unless they choose to. However in 2004, a study that examined objectification and the link to disordered eating suggested that women who do choose to read a magazine are more likely to objectify themselves (self-objectification) and subject their bodies to constant surveillance. These women are more likely to feel disgusted, ashamed or anxious about their own bodies, and have lower self esteem (a critical factor in body image). [33]

Academic research on self objectification found the following impacts:
- Self-objectification can cause women to perform worse in intellectual tasks, and to waste mental energy on self-consciousness and anxiety[34].

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[31] Posner, J (1984)'State Censorship, Pornography, Sexuality', *Atkinson Review of Canadian Studies,1,2,* Spring
[32] Ewing, S (2007) pg.27
[33] Tiggermann M & Kuring J (2004), 'The role of pressed mood,' *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 43:299-311; Tylka TL & Hill MS *(2004), '*Objectification theory as it relates to disordered eating among college women,' Sex Roles 51(11/12):719-730
34 Fredrickson BL, Roberts TA, Noll SM, Quinn DM and Twenge JM (1998)', 'That swimsuit becomes you: sex differences in self-objectification, restrained eating, and math performance,' Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 75(1):269-284; Hebl, King and Lin (2004).

- Women are less likely to be physically active, and to benefit from the exercise they do, if motivated by self-objectification and concern about their appearance.[35]
- Self-objectification also encourages women to objectify other women.[36]
- Some researchers think that self-objectification even contributes to the risk of self-harm, especially cutting.[37]

Investigations into this issue have demonstrated that women's attitudes toward their own bodies are worse after looking at thin media images. In young teenage girls, Durkin and Paxton's research found that looking at pictures of thin, idealised models is likely to cause lowered satisfaction with their body and a higher state of depression than before looking at the images[38] In adult women, depression, anxiety and anger are short-term effects of looking at such pictures of women's bodies.[39]

Tiggeman and Kuring state "recurring feelings of body shame and anxiety cannot readily be overcome, since the societally prescribed thin ideal of beauty is virtually impossible for most women to achieve. Such uncontrollability is a cornerstone of the learned helplessness theory of depression."[40]

Idealised' Thin, Glamorous Women

When it comes to pictures of thin, 'beautiful' bodies, there is now evidence about how these pictures affects us. A study involving 118 female college students found that women were more depressed and angry after seeing picture of thin models, than after seeing pictures of inanimate objects.[41]

Images of thin women are not always appealing. Women who are thin because they're homeless, hungry, or addicted to drugs don't make other women feel bad about being bigger. Recently, researchers have used more specific terms such as 'thin, *idealised* women' or 'thin, *glamorous* women', rather than just thin women. It is the 'thin, *glamourous* women' that is causing negative body image for women.

A thin, glamorous woman is portrayed as an easy ideal to achieve. But in actuality it is causing women to seek cosmetic procedures to achieve the unrealistic ideal. Henderson-King and Brooks have concluded that "in a culture that idealizes thinness, women who **consider**

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[35] Strelan P, Mehaffey SF and Tiggemann M (2003), 'Self-objectification and esteem in young women: the mediating role of reasons for exercise,' Sex Roles 48(1/2):89-95; Segar M, Spruijt-Metz D and Nolen-Hoeksema S (2006), 'Go Figure? Body-shape motivations are associated with decreased physical activity participation among midlife women,' Sex Roles February 54(3/4):175-187; Tiggemann M and Williamson S (2000), 'The effect of exercise on body satisfaction and self-esteem as a function

[36] Strelan P and Hargreaves D (2005), 'Women who objectify other women: the vicious circle of objectification?' Sex Roles 52(9/10):707-712.

[37] Shaw SN (2002), 'Shifting conversations on girls' and women's self-injury: an analysis of the clinical literature in historical context,' Feminism and Psychology May;12:191-219; Meuhlenkamp JJ, Swanson JD and Brausch AM (2005), 'Self-objectification, risk taking, and self-harm in college women,' Psychology of Women Quarterly 29:24-32.

[38] Durkin SJ and Paxton SJ (2002), 'Predictors of vulnerability to reduced body image satisfaction and psychological wellbeing in response to exposure to idealized female media images in adolescent girls,' Journal of Psychosomatic Research 53:995-1005;

[39]39 Groesz LM, Levine MP and Murnen SK (2002), 'The effect of experimental presentation of thin media images on body satisfaction: a meta-analytic review,' International Journal of Eating Disorders 31:1-16; Pinhas L et al (1999).

[40] Tiggemann and Kuring (2004)

[41] Pinhas et al (1999)

themselves to be overweight may be especially susceptible to the risks of a variety of relatively extreme body modification techniques, including cosmetic surgery."[42] In the year 2007, women made up approximately 90% of all cosmetic surgery patients in the United States and were thus much more likely than men to face the health risks associated with any surgical procedure.[43]

Self-objectification and Eating Disorders

One component of a well-developed self includes "owning one's body and being at peace with it".[44] Does popular culture help women to be at peace with their bodies? It seems not. Scrutinising and comparing our bodies with others, especially when we constantly see images of thin, unblemished, sexualised women, is likely to make us dissatisfied and ashamed. This is even more likely when we believe the ideals presented to us.

Tylka and Hill found some evidence for the link between women's belief in beauty ideals, and being ashamed of their bodies.[45] They surveyed 460 U.S. college women and found that women who believed that they were being pressured by the culture to be thin were more likely to subject their bodies to surveillance. Body surveillance, in turn, was related to the experience of body shame. Tylka and Hill concluded that the link between eating disorders and sexual objectification was body surveillance and shame.   This research was reinforced by others who found lower body satisfaction among teenagers was associated with unhealthy weight-control methods, binge-eating, and less physical activity.[46]

Dieting to Look Good vs. Healthy Lifestyle

Australian researchers found that, compared with men, women exercised more for the purposes of losing weight, increasing tone, and enhancing mood. A study by Strelan and colleagues found that if young women's exercise was motivated by self-objectification and concern about appearance, they were *less* likely to benefit in terms of body satisfaction, body esteem, and self-esteem. The study found that the best psychological benefits are obtained when exercise is carried out for reasons of health, fitness, mood and enjoyment.[47]

WFA commends *Cleo's* inclusion of a bonus health and fitness magazine every month, and *Cosmopolitans* advice on healthy eating from a dietician in their Body Love section. However these inclusions still promote a physical image-based beauty. For example, the *Cleo* June 2009 edition included articles titled 'look amazing on the outside', 'get your dream body now' and 'cellulite: finally a solution'. What these articles reflect is that women's worth is only found in

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[42] Henderson-King & Brooks (2009) pg. 140

[43] Henderson-King, D & Brooks, KD (2009) 'Materialism, Sociocultural Appearance Massages, and Paternal Attitudes Predict College Women's Attitudes About Cosmetic Surgery', *Psychology of Women Quarterly,* **33**, 133–142.

[44] Middleton W (2005), 'Owning the past, claiming the present: perspectives on the treatment of dissociative patients,' Australasian Psychiatry 13(1):40-49.

[45] Tylka and Hill (2004)

[46] Neumark-Sztainer D et al (2006), 'Does body satisfaction matter? Five-year longitudinal associations between body satisfaction and health behaviors in adolescent females and males,' Journal of Adolescent Health 39:244-251.

[47] Strelan P, Mehaffey SF and Tiggermann M (2003) 'Self-objectification and esteem in young women: the mediating role of reasons for exercise,' *Sex Roles* 48 (1/2): 89-95

her body when it is 'amazing' and cellulite free, and dieting to be thin is synonymous with needing to look beautiful, not part of a balanced healthy lifestyle.

Sexualisation Defined

The American Psychological Association (APA) research defines several components to sexualisation[48] including:

- a person's value comes *only* from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics;
- a person is held to a standard that *equates* physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy; and
- 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.

Sexualised Images, Magazines and the Link to Body Image

Sexualised images in magazines have become increasingly prevalent and are not restricted to teen or adult women's magazines. Girls' magazines give their readers mixed messages. Developmentally appropriate content which would be helpful to girls is drowned out by the emphasis on being fashion and body conscious.

A content analysis of a sample edition of Barbie Magazine, Total Girl and Disney Girl demonstrates that in the case of the latter two, approximately **half of the content** is sexualising material, and in the case of Barbie Magazine, fully **three quarters** of the content is sexualising material.[49] There exists pressure on children to adopt sexualised appearance and behaviour at a young age.

The APA research showed that premature sexualisation is linked with serious mental health problems like eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression.[50] It notes previous studies of magazines that find that:
"...attracting the attention of boys by looking hot and sexy is the point of many of the articles, text, cover lines, ads, and photographs. ...Even articles on physical fitness analysed...centered on the need for girls to increase their sexual desirability through exercise rather than on improving their health or well-being."[51]

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[48] American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007), *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls,* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
[49] Rush E and La Nauze A (2006), *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of children in Australia,* The Australian Institute, Discussion Paper number 90, October, p.vii.
50 American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007).
51 Ferron C (1997), 'Body image in adolescence: cross-cultural research – results of the preliminary phase of a quantitative study,' Adolescence Fall;32(127):735-45.

Conclusion

Naomi Wolf, in *The Beauty Myth*, argued that one factor restraining women from achieving political, economic and domestic equality was the perceived need and ongoing struggle to live up to the 'beauty myth'. She believed that this struggle wasted women's energies, and was based on a lie.[52]It is also a driving force behind negative body image.

There is not one simple answer to addressing body dissatisfaction problems. In this submission we have presented evidence which suggests that the causes of and issues surrounding negative body image are complex and numerous but hold the common ground of being potentially devastating for the healthy future of women. The development of a National Strategy and Code of Conduct is a positive step forward, but more is needed. WFA believes this enquiry will play an important role among many initiatives needed that are vital to countering negative cultural and social messages, communicated through mass media and an individual's immediate social environment.

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[52] Wolf N (1991), The Beauty Myth, Vintage, London, p. 139.

Appendix A

Insert from *The Portrayal of Women in Outdoor Advertising* Report:

Victorian Government Gender Portrayal Guidelines for Outdoor Advertising

Overview

The following Guidelines[7] have been developed to assist the advertising industry develop positive portrayals of women and men in advertising. In doing so, the Guidelines are not designed to restrict or censor creativity. Outdoor advertising is a unique form of communication. It is acknowledged that observing images presented via the medium of outdoor is unavoidable, and that these advertisements do not provide an explanatory context. The Guidelines therefore provide a useful mechanism for developing portrayals of women and men that are positive, and are suitable for general viewing. The Guidelines acknowledge that both women and men are at risk of being portrayed in an inappropriate or potentially harmful way. However, whilst the Guidelines are applicable to the portrayal of both women and men, some issues are particularly relevant to the portrayal of women.

1. **Outdoor advertising is a public medium, and as such, advertisers should be sensitive to the contexts in which outdoor advertising is displayed and viewed.**

Comment: It is important to consider the particular physical location, geographical area and demographic features of an area in which an outdoor advertisement may be displayed. For example, it may be inappropriate to display particular images in and around public transport shelters, within the residential area of particular cultural communities, and in close proximity to schoolyards and religious institutions.

2. **Advertising should avoid using negative sexual imagery of both women and men.**

Comment: Sexual images that: are exploitative, have little or no relevance to the product being sold, suggest that people are defined primarily by their sexuality, imply that sexually harassing behaviour is 'normal', or objectify women's and men's bodies by portraying them as items for consumption, are inappropriate. Advertising featuring sexual imagery should avoid the gratuitous or tasteless use of nudity; the use of girls / young women and boys / young men in sexual poses; and impressions of voyeurism.

3. **Advertising should portray women and men as equally competent in a wide range of activities both inside and outside the home, including the workplace.**

Comment: Advertising should avoid a narrow or unrepresentative view of women's roles, occupations, professional status, power in the community or level of intelligence. The predominance of men portrayed in authoritative roles and the absence of women from similarly credible or powerful roles undermines equal opportunity values. The depiction of women in competent, leadership roles is therefore encouraged.

4. **Advertising should portray both women and men in the full spectrum of diversity, including age, appearance, and background.**

Comment: Women and men in Victoria are diverse in many ways, including age, ethnicity, religion, culture, and sexuality. Advertisers are encouraged to reflect this diversity by seeking to increase, where appropriate, the number of images of women and men who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, indigenous Australians, older women and men, and women and men who are lesbian and gay.

5. **Violent images should always be avoided in advertising. No person should be portrayed as being the recipient of, or being responsible for, implicit or actual violent behaviour.**

Comment: In particular, women must not be portrayed in ways that may compromise their public and private safety. For example, images depicting women's bodies in a dismembered way, as physically restrained, or as the likely recipient of violent behaviour, should be avoided. Advertisers must not portray men in ways that imply or advocate violent behaviour toward women.

6. **Advertising should seek to use language that is inclusive of both women and men and does not discriminate against either sex. Language that is likely to be offensive to a general audience, including children, should be avoided.**

Comment: Language, as well as imagery, is a powerful form of communication. When depicting words and speech within an advertisement, advertisers are encouraged to use gender-neutral language to demonstrate and promote the equality of women and men. Language that is likely to insult or offend should also be avoided.