

The Editor
The Australian
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Dear Sir,

The serious problem of marketing and media practices that promote the early sexualisation of Australian children was well explored in The Australia Institute's October report "Corporate paedophilia". The many letters to the press, articles, and current affairs segments at that time, showed that this problem is of serious concern to many sections of the community. Phillip Adams gave further prominence to the issues in the *Weekend Australian* magazine of 19 November.

It is vital for children's health and wellbeing that the issues remain in the spotlight, and that appropriate and decisive action be taken

We, the undersigned professionals, have worked for many years in the fields of child health, welfare, or media. We believe that the early sexualisation of children has serious consequences for children's development and psychological health.

Commercial forces turn children into consumers. This is bad enough when it compromises health by encouraging them to consume bad food, cigarettes and alcohol. But when commercial forces turn children into sexualised commodities, it corrodes the core of the developing child. These practices set up young children for inappropriate and dangerous roles and behaviours, and make them more vulnerable by far, to sexual danger and harm.

We believe that this is an issue which, if left unchecked, can have serious and costly consequences for the welfare of children, and for the community as a whole.

Parents and caregivers can help by avoiding sexualised products for their children, such as makeup, bras and skimpy clothing for the very young, many music video programs, and "adultified" children's magazines. Government agencies responsible for child health and protection need to urgently examine what supports can be offered.

Those who choose to market to children in this way should bear the primary responsibility for the adverse outcomes of their practices. We note the recent formation of the industry umbrella group, the Australian Marketing Communications Alliance. Member companies are proposing to combine their interests to "fight attacks on advertising and marketing communication" and "underlying threats to free enterprise". We hope that they would also be open to hear, and to respond to, the reasonable and serious concerns of the community.

Phillip Adams threw out this challenge at the conclusion of his article: “They (those marketing to children) should be ashamed of themselves for doing it. We should be ashamed of ourselves for tolerating it.”

Yours sincerely

- Dr Neil Wigg. President, Paediatric and Child Health Division of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians.
- Dr Joe Tucci. CEO, Australian Childhood Foundation
- Prof Dorothy Scott. Director, Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia
- Jane Roberts. President, Young Media Australia
- Rita Princi. National Convenor, Australian Psychological Society: Child, Adolescent & Family Interest Group; Princi Consulting
- Prof Frank Oberklaid. Director, Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne
- Dr Louise Newman. Director, NSW Institute of Psychiatry
- Bernadette McMenemy AO.
CEO, Childwise Australia
- Dr Patricia Edgar AM. Author and Founding Director, Australian Children's TV Foundation
- Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs AO,
Child Development, University of South Australia
- Steve Biddulph, Psychologist, author, and Australian Father of the Year 2000.
- Hon Terry Aulich. Executive Director, Australian Council of State Schools Organisations

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