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Media release

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Sexualisation of children – stronger regulation needed

Political action to strengthen the regulation of advertising and marketing that sexualises children is needed urgently, according to a new paper from the Australia Institute.

A previous Institute paper entitled *Corporate Paedophilia* analysed the rise of a raunch culture targeting children at increasingly younger ages.

Lead author of the new paper – *Letting Children be Children* – Dr Emma Rush said the findings of risks for children detailed in *Corporate Paedophilia* met with either denial or silence from advertisers, marketers, retailers, magazine editors, photographers and broadcasters responsible for disseminating the sexualising material discussed in the report.

“On the other hand we were inundated with concern from families,” Dr Rush said.

“A range of experts also confirmed the many risks to children who are sexualised by advertising and marketing at too early an age.”

Dr Rush said there was particular concern about fashion and gossip magazines pitched at girls as young as six who were encouraged to dance in sexually provocative ways, idolise highly sexualised young women like Paris Hilton, and have crushes on adult male celebrities.

“Girls’ magazines are not regulated at all, and their internal codes of practice give very limited guidance about material that is developmentally appropriate for their readers,” she said.

Releasing the second report today, Institute Director Dr Clive Hamilton said Dr Rush’s paper showed that the self-regulation system run by the Advertising Standards Bureau had failed badly.

“Over the last four years the Bureau has dealt with many hundreds of complaints about 399 ads showing sex, sexuality and nudity, but they requested advertisers to remove or amend an ad in only two cases,” he said. “Then, following our first paper on the issue, complaints about two advertisements explicitly linking sexualised images and children were upheld but this is the exception rather than the rule.

“Political leaders need to act in support of the family values they are usually so quick to talk about and bring in a rigorous system to deal with people profiting from exploiting children in this very harmful way.”

The summary of the report is available under “What’s New” on the Australia Institute’s website - www.tai.org.au.