Bailey Review on the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood (Industry and Wider Stakeholder Version)

Consultation Response Form
Please select ONE box that best describes you as a respondent:

**PLEASE NOTE, IF YOU ARE RESPONDING AS A PARENT, THERE IS A SEPARATE CALL FOR EVIDENCE. YOU CAN ACCESS THIS FROM THE DEPARTMENT’S e-CONSULTATION WEBSITE:**
http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations

![Table of options]

FPA is one of the UK’s leading sexual health charities, with over 80 years’ experience of providing the UK public with accurate sexual health information, advice and support services. Our mission is to help establish a society in which everyone has positive, informed and non-judgemental attitudes to sex and relationships; where everyone can make informed decisions about sex, relationships and reproduction so that they can enjoy sexual health free from prejudice and harm.

FPA provides a comprehensive sexual health information service, including a national telephone helpline and web enquiry service that respond to 45,000 enquiries a year on all aspects of sex, sexual health and relationships, and a library service for professionals. We produce a range of publications for professionals and the public on sexually transmitted infections, contraception and pregnancy choices, including abortion, as well as educational materials to support parents and schools to deliver age-appropriate sex and relationships education. We distribute around 10 million pieces of literature a year. FPA offers a variety of resources, including training courses, for those involved in delivering sexual health services. We also run a series of community based sex and relationships education programmes for young people, parents and people with learning disabilities. FPA represents a national voice on sexual health, working with and advocating for professionals and the public to ensure high quality information and services are available to all who need them.
### SECTION 2: FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS

#### General

8 a) The following factors are sometimes said to put pressure on children to grow up too quickly. Which factors do you think have the most influence on children, if any? (tick all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sexual images (e.g. TV, films and advertising)</th>
<th>Advertising and marketing aimed at children</th>
<th>Peer pressure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>Seeing inappropriate things on the internet</td>
<td>The things that celebrities like pop stars and actors do</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None of these</td>
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FPA is aware that all of the factors listed above could have an impact on children and young people. Children and young people learn about relationships and sexuality from a young age and from a variety of sources. As well as the factors listed above, children and young people learn from, among others, family, friends and schools.

Peer influence is very influential and young people often behave in an older, sexualised, way because they see older peers at school or siblings doing so. Also, because they aspire to be like celebrities who often represent success and status, young people face a pressure to imitate them.

Not all sources of information are accurate and children and young people may pick up skewed messages about body image, relationships and sexual activity. FPA strongly believes that children and young people need to be empowered with the knowledge, skills and confidence to interpret the messages they receive and to make informed choices about their relationships. We strongly believe that age appropriate sex and relationships education (SRE) should be made a statutory subject at all key stages to prepare children and young people for the choices they will need to make as they grow up.

FPA is aware that some people are concerned that SRE can sexualise children and young people. However, international evidence has demonstrated that this is not the case and that high quality school based SRE can lead to young people starting to have sex later, especially when linked to confidential advice services.¹

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meeting government public health priorities, such as achieving a reduction in teenage pregnancy rates and the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections\textsuperscript{2}. There is significant support among young people and parents for SRE; a survey conducted for the then Department for Children, Schools and Families in October 2009 found that 81 per cent of parents agreed that all children and young people should attend mandatory sex and relationships education lessons\textsuperscript{3}.

FPA is aware that many parents would like to talk with their children about issues around growing up, sex and relationships but are embarrassed and unsure about where to start. We have developed the Speakeasy programme, a community based programme that is delivered over a period of eight weeks and that is designed to enable parents and carers to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to have these sometimes difficult conversations with their children. The course covers factual information about methods of contraception, sexually transmitted infections and the changes that take place during puberty. It also enables parents to explore the pressures their children may be experiencing, how to keep children and young people safe, including online, and how to be proactive in starting conversations about growing up, sex and relationships. The impact of media, advertising and celebrity culture is discussed within the Speakeasy programme. Parents are encouraged to consider strategies to help their children become more critical of, and resilient in the face of, these external pressures. Evaluations of the project have demonstrated the positive impact it has on parents’ knowledge and confidence. Programmes like Speakeasy can help parents and carers to understand better the factors that may have an impact on their children and support parents and carers to be able to actively guide their children through their development.

**Gender**

8 b) Do you think these pressures...

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>X</th>
<th>Affect boys and girls equally?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>Affect girls more?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>Affect boys more?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>None of these</td>
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\textsuperscript{3} Populus, *Sex Education Poll (October 2009)* (London: Populus, 2009)
FPA strongly believes that boys and young men are affected by messages around body image, sexuality and relationships as much as girls and young women. Boys learn to be men in a society where it is rare for men to show their feelings openly, ask for help, admit that they do not know something or look after their health.

FPA is concerned that strong gender stereotyping is having an adverse impact on young men and young women. Through our community projects we are aware that young men are concerned about how they look and how the way they behave will be perceived by their peers. FPA used to run an SRE project for young men in Greenwich called WizeBoy. While the project was operating issues around gang culture and masculinity, including peer pressure on young men to behave in a certain way, were identified as having a significant impact on young men, including their sexual behaviour. The project worked to try to address some of these.

In addition, strong notions of femininity are affecting young people’s relationships. Research by Katy Redgrave and Mark Limmer showed that a conventional notion of femininity persisted amongst young people which led to young women feeling powerless within their sexual relationships. Young women described sex as something that was done to them by men, which involved more pain than pleasure. This led to pressure for young women to conform and left them less able to negotiate safer sex with their partners as they did not want to appear too ‘knowing’. Consent is an issue that young men and young women struggle with; for example both young men and young women at times, may not know if the sex they are having is consensual. FPA is concerned that some of the items currently on sale for young people perpetuate conventional gender stereotypes and have a negative effect on young people’s self-esteem, relationships and wellbeing.

Public Space - Physical Environment

10 Thinking about the public space (streets, public transport, shopping and leisure areas), do you think that children are exposed inappropriately to things of a too commercial or sexual nature? If you answered yes, please explain why giving specific examples where possible.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>X</td>
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There are many examples of gender stereotypes and sexualised images used in advertising in public spaces, advertising boards and bus stops. They carry semi-erotic images of men and women selling everything from cars to scents. This advertising suggests to children and young people that success is associated with perfect bodies and semi-nudity.

These images are also mostly heterosexual resulting in reinforced stigmatisation of non heterosexual relationships.

Public Space - Virtual Environment

11 Thinking about broadcasting and the internet, do you think that current measures to protect children from exposure to inappropriately commercialised or sexualised content and advertising are effective and sufficient? If no, please give specific examples of where you think there are weaknesses.

[ ] Yes  [ ] No  [ ] Not Sure

FPA is aware that many parents are concerned about their children’s safety online. Many young people use social networking to keep in touch with their friends and post personal information online not realising how this may be used. In addition, some young people access pornography online as a source of information about sex and relationships in the absence of other sources of education. Many children and young people have greater knowledge and understanding of technology and how to use it than their parents, teachers or other adults. We are concerned that this can put children and young people at risk, including receiving skewed and unrealistic messages about sex and relationships.

FPA believes that greater efforts need to be made to ensure that parents are aware of how they can protect their children online and our Speakeasy programme includes information about internet safety. In fact internet safety represents the number one concern for parents when these issues are raised in through our Speakeasy workshops. Similarly, it is crucial to ensure that children and young people are equipped with the skills, knowledge and confidence to interpret and critically analyse the messages they receive from online media; this can be supported by high quality SRE.
Clothing and Products

12 Thinking about the retail sector, do you think clothing and products for children are sufficiently age-appropriate and gender-appropriate (including non-gendered)? If not, please provide specific examples.

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not Sure

As a result of our project work with young people we are aware of concerns about the impact of certain products on young people’s sexual development. An example would be the sale of stationery and other products featuring the Playboy bunny logo aimed at young people. Many young people appear to be unaware of what the logo stands for and instead just see it as ‘cute’ and a fashion accessory. Young people who have participated in FPA projects have said that they buy it to fit in with friends and peers and many have been shocked when they hear that the logo is associated with pornography.

Young people’s lack of understanding is of concern as it can put them at risk. If a young person entered ‘Playboy’ into an internet search engine, they would be directed to pornography sites, rather than to fashion or young people’s websites. In addition, carrying items with the logo on may send out messages to other people which the young people do not understand or intend.

General Comments

16 Is there anything else you want to say about the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood?

As has been noted above, FPA is aware that some young people are accessing pornography to gain information about sex and relationships and there are concerns that this is having a negative impact on their views of relationships and sexual behaviour. Other research conducted by Katy Redgrave and Mark Limmer in Rochdale has shown that pornography appears to play a significant role in shaping young people’s sexual expectations. Pornography appeared to have a direct influence on young men’s ideas of what should be included in a sexual repertoire and led to pressure on young women to comply. There is also anecdotal evidence that pornography is having a negative impact on young people’s self-esteem because they cannot live up to the fantasy scenarios portrayed in pornography.

Adults are able to make their own choices about whether or not to access pornography. We are concerned that young people are not able to make these
choices but because of commercial pressures, such as the sale of Playboy branded stationery, and a lack of knowledge, young people are being directed towards a narrow portrayal of sexuality and relationships found in pornography. FPA is concerned that this could have a detrimental impact on young people’s relationships and sexual health now and in the future. We believe that improved sex and relationships education (SRE) in schools could help to mitigate some of these effects and we campaign strongly for this. However, at the same time, we believe there needs to be greater understanding of the impact that commercial organisations can have on young people’s developing sexuality and adults need to take greater responsibility to address this where it may be harmful. We also believe that there should be better regulation of internet providers to make it more difficult for pornography to be accessed online.

17 Finally, please let us have your views on responding to this call for evidence (e.g. the number and type of questions, was it easy to find, understand, complete etc.)

FPA welcomes the opportunity to comment during the call for evidence for the review on the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood. We found the questions useful.

We would suggest caution to some degree as often discussions about sexualisation of young people can lead to moral panic. It is clear that often commercialisation of young people is mistaken for sexualisation. Our experience tells us that often adults think a young person is behaving in a sexualised way. The young person does not recognise this and is in fact simply following a fashion or trend.

FPA believes that the best means to ensure that children and young people are resilient to risk is to equip them with confidence, self esteem, aspiration and ambition. Parents, families, schools and the wider community all have an important role to play in this.