



The Potential Crisis and Response Behind the Sexualisation of the Girl in the Advertising of the 2023 Balenciaga Spring/Summer Collection

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Abstract. Balenciaga's 2023 ad for sexualised girls causes uproar. The widespread boycott of JNBY in the East in 2019 over its controversial children's clothing line was not coincidental. Behind the incident, sexualising girls can have an indelible negative impact on them. However, the issue is serious and worthy of study. In this paper, the negative impact of sexualised girls will be studied through a qualitative approach. As a result of the research, the main adverse effects of sexualised girls are as follows. Girls who are exposed to sexualised advertising engage in negative self-sexualisation. Psychologically, girls experience lower self-esteem, negative emotions and depressive states. Non-sexualised girls tend to have a lower psychological evaluation of sexualised girls. On the other hand, parents may become potential targets for sexualised girls and lower their academic expectations of them. The popularity of child sexualisation advertising has undoubtedly led to further propaganda and group expansion of paedophile culture. Paedophiles can further support the self-sexualisation of girls while at the same time reinforcing the sexual exploitation of girls. In the social environment this can create cyberbullying and promote the use of sexy child models in media advertising platforms. Relevant measures to address this issue include the need for schools to provide counselling programmes. Parents of girls should be sensitive to the sexualisation issues that may arise in the girl's life. The need to legally regulate the content of advertising. A code of professional ethics needs to be developed for those involved. In the community, positive social communication can effectively raise public awareness of how girls are portrayed in advertising. Sexualised girls in media advertising can have a wide range of negative effects on the girl's body and mind, family, community, social culture and social environment, effectively mitigated through legislation, education and social initiatives.

Keywords: Balenciaga, JNBY, Sexualisation, Influence, Solutions

1 Introduction

Not long ago, the Balenciaga spring/summer 2023 campaign was boycotted. The campaign featured child models holding teddy bears in erotic bondage garments and photos of various accessories with BDSM connotations (acts of bondage, domination

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and submission). This sexualisation of children caused widespread discomfort and outcry. However, this incident is not the first in fashion advertising. In recent years, more and more people are noticing a change in the otherwise innocent and happy image of children in advertising. Children often appear in advertisements for adult clothing and gestures, especially girls, wearing clothes that do not suit them [1]. This inappropriate representation of children's age is known as 'child sexualisation' [1]. The survey revealed less research on the sexualisation of children in advertising today, but the issue is serious and deserves to be studied. This paper will analyse the potential crisis behind the sexualisation of children and options for responding to it, using the 2023 Balenciaga spring/summer campaign as an example. The paper will examine the cultural phenomenon through both qualitative approaches. In the case study in this paper, attention will shift from the West to the East, with the JNBY 2019 event in China serving as a wake-up call to the general public. This suggests that the sexualisation of advertising for children is a worldwide issue rather than a single regional phenomenon. Sexually suggestive children's fashion advertising is interlinked with contemporary mass media and is widely disseminated on the internet in the form of images. This creates a crisis that may, firstly, mislead and suggest children who have not yet formed their own values; secondly, negatively suggest parents; thirdly, lead to a negative culture of paedophilia and, fourthly, have a negative impact on the social environment. The paper will conclude with solutions to address or weaken the sexualisation of children.

2 Background

2.1 The universality of sexual advertising

The sexualisation of girls in advertising is a widespread problem. In the West, there was an uproar over an advertisement in 2023 in Balenciaga. The girl in the ad is holding a teddy bear with BDSM connotations. Another girl is holding a teddy bear in a see-through fishnet outfit, with leather straps on each of its limbs that suggest bondage and a chain around its neck in addition to a collar. In addition, the lock on the teddy bear echoes the key in the hand of the man in the advertisement for the same series. It is disturbingly reminiscent of the perspective of a paedophile controlling a child. In response, people burned the clothes they had bought from Balenciaga and took to the streets in an outcry against the campaign. Kim Kardashian took to social media to say: "As a mother of four, I was struck by these disturbing images [2]. The safety of children must be seen in the highest light and any attempt to normalise any form of child abuse should have no place in our society". In the end, Balenciaga removed the images in question and issued an apology following pressure from the masses. A more typical case in the East is the JNBY Cloth advertising incident in China 2019. In the advertisements, children's clothes are depicted with sketches of men saying, "Let me touch you". Girls are even shown wearing clothes with pictures of naked girls covering their bottoms. These sexually suggestive garments brought not only anger but also concern to consumers. After the JNBY Cloth Children's Clothing advertisement fiasco, a large number of parents have been asking netizens to help

"identify" whether there are any obscure and indecent words or patterns in the clothing patterns by posting their children's clothing on shopping platforms. The market regulator has interviewed the company and JNBY Cloth has taken down the children's clothes in question, returned the clothes sold for no reason and issued an apology. In addition to these two well-known cases from East and West, there are many, many more. 1975 Love Cosmetics advertisements for children's bath gels show girls in mature make-up with the tagline "Innocence is sexier than you think". 2011 French Vogue cover magazine advertisements show two girls in age-inappropriate exaggerated make-up. The 2011 French Vogue cover ad shows two girls in age-inappropriate exaggerated make-up, with mature curly hair, brightly painted nails and nude clothing. It is clear from this that the problem of child pornography advertising is a worldwide problem and not a single regional phenomenon. There is strong resistance to child pornography advertising because it can have far-reaching negative effects.

3 Influence

The sexualisation of girls in advertising can have serious consequences, which are analysed in the text in four main areas: the potential impact on girls' behaviour and psychology, the impact on their parents, the cultural impact on paedophilia and the impact on the social environment.

3.1 Potential effects on girls' behaviour and psychology

3.1.1 Sexualisation of self

Girls who have not yet formed their values may engage in a certain degree of blind obedience and imitative behaviour after frequent exposure to these sexualised advertisements. Frequent exposure to these sexualised advertisements can influence girls' conceptualisation of femininity, sexualising girls. APA Advertisements featuring girls dressed in sophisticated clothing, sexy make-up, flirtatious expressions and elaborate jewellery are messages that undoubtedly mislead girls in a subtle way. In a reported reality, Graff et al. documented changes in the number of sexualised and childlike features in images of girls [3]. The results showed that the sexualised traits in the pictures increased over time while the number of childlike traits in the girls' lives decreased. This indicates that the display of information in the pictures and the sexualisation of the girl's self in her daily life are closely related. Girls may think they can dress in clothes that are not appropriate for their age and wear mature make-up, an act that certainly blurs the boundaries between girls and women. It allows the girl to complete this step of sexualising herself.

3.1.2 Psychological changes

In terms of psychological changes, sexualised girls come out with self-defeating attitudes. It was stated in the study that exposure to sexualised feminine ideals was associated with lower self-esteem, negative emotions and depressive symptoms among adolescent girls and women [4]. This means that girls form an idealised image in their

minds after frequent exposure to sexualised advertisements. The gap between this unrealistic idealised image and the real-life version of herself can cause greater psychological stress for the girl. At this point, the girl may develop negative feelings about herself, believing that she is inferior because she cannot meet external expectations of herself. This is particularly evident at the age of puberty. As girls begin to develop physically, they may become frightened and worried about their changing bodies. Girls are at a much higher risk of developing anorexia nervosa. These self-deprecating emotions are detrimental to the girl's own development.

On the other hand, non-sexualised girls tend to hold lower psychological evaluations of sexualised girls. In the survey, it was found that girls associated the sexualised attributes shown in the image model with negative personality traits such as: "believing, bossy, dominant, self-centred, rebellious, arrogant, provocative, less intelligent" [5]. Because advertisements, especially in fashion magazines, are likely to promote gender stereotypes that may be harmful to women and girls. For example, there are words such as girls just do not like to study, cannot learn maths, and dumb beauty. These images can also create hostile feelings towards sexualised girls, thus placing them in a position of isolation and disgust.

3.2 Impact on the parents of girls

Advertisements that sexualise girls can have a negative impact on the parents of girls. On the one hand, influenced by the advertising media, parents may think that mature clothing is normal and has no negative impact, and they may dress their children in inappropriate clothing. This action can create external norms for the child and make the child believe that wearing sexy clothing is a sign of self-attraction. This can further exacerbate the sexualisation of the girl child's ego. On the other hand, parents can lower their expectations of their children. A survey of 89 preadolescent girls between the ages of 6 and 9 on issues related to self-sexualisation and self-image showed that parents have lower expectations of girls who are self-sexualised [6]. This means that parents subliminally instil in their girls the negative sentiment that their children just need to be beautiful. Girls who receive this signal also lower their self-expectations further and develop negative learning emotions. This can lead to lower grades and a perception that the girl is not gifted to learn. With parents having lower academic expectations of their children, girls will further lower their own academic expectations. These negative advertisements can create false perceptions for parents of sexualised children's rationalisations and negative competence expectations.

3.3 Influence on paedophile culture

Two clothing brands, Balenciaga and JNBY Cloth, have paedophilic elements in their advertisements. These include the sexually suggestive "Let me touch you" clothing line and the BDSM-flavoured teddy bear. This is tantamount to suggesting that children are a sexualised group. This objectification of girls undoubtedly contributes to the prevalence of a paedophile culture and creates an element of unease for the safety of children. According to research, men who sexually abuse children have a higher

level of perceived support for the sexualisation of children. Among those men who also sexually exploited children online, there was a link between this cognitive theme and exposure to sexual abuse with children [7]. This implies that paedophiles further support the self-sexualisation of girls while also reinforcing the sexual exploitation of girls. The prevalence of sexualised child advertising will undoubtedly allow for further propaganda and group expansion of paedophile culture.

3.4 Impact on the social environment

3.4.1 Cyberbullying

The sexualisation of girls in advertising media can expose girls to more cyberbullying. Analysis shows that girls face a delicate balance of criticism if they are too sexy. Internet users shame sexualised girls by labelling them with nasty stereotypes such as 'slut'. Girls experience a certain level of anxiety when they are labelled with these shaming terms. One grade 7 girl (Y1) said: "I don't understand how she can call me a slut and a whore because I don't even show my face. I don't wear bad clothes; I don't post bad pictures. I don't understand how I can be like that [8]." These negative comments can lead to self-doubt in girls.

3.4.2 Media advertising platforms

The trend towards child sexualisation in media advertising will further promote the use of sexualised images of children by advertising brands. Research says that in order to build brand loyalty early on, youth marketers exploit the natural developmental impulses of children to be older and more mature than their actual age by targeting children with adult-friendly appeal and products [9]. This means that when sexualised girls become the rage, further images of sexualised girls are adopted in advertising. At the same time, the brands promoted in the advertisements will also adopt images of children with adult appeal to fit people's preferences. This move will undoubtedly exacerbate and rationalise the sexualisation of girls. According to the report, Gooding, Vandenberg, Mernin and Smolak et al. examined popular clothing shops in the US, and they found that 69% of the clothing had only childlike features, 4% had only sexual features and 25.4% had both sexual and childlike features [9]. This means that nearly thirty percent of children's clothing in the United States has sexualised features. This is certainly a wake-up call to the media advertising platforms that are pushing sexualised advertising hard.

4 Related Solutions

4.1 Psychological Guidance and Prevention in Schools and Families

4.1.1 Schools

As a place where children are educated, schools can provide psychological guidance and prevention to children in a visual way. For example, the school is equipped with appropriate psychological teachers and organises psychological courses. The Dutch

have started "spring fever weeks" as a crash course in kindergarten reproduction, while the Norwegian "puberty" series of explicit sex education is aimed at children aged 8 to 12 [10]. These courses are designed to establish healthy values in young children. During the course, children are equipped with relevant psychological health knowledge and are able to express their doubts or difficulties during the course discussions. At the same time, the psychology teacher involved in the course is kept informed of any gaps in the children's knowledge and can address the girls' knowledge and psychological problems in a scientific manner to help them develop healthily. This measure allows children to be discerning in the face of sexualised advertising. They can look at themselves objectively, get rid of the stereotypes imposed by the advertisements, raise their expectations and avoid negative emotions.

4.1.2 Families

Parents need to be able to identify advertisements with sexualised girl elements and take a firm stance rejection. Research has shown that parents, particularly mothers, are a major influence on girls' body image and that mothers' self-objectification is associated with the use of beauty products and appearance problems in girls aged 5-8 years [11]. Parents may fail to recognise appearance concerns, or they promote comparisons of their daughters' appearance, which can have a potentially negative impact on body image. Parents may consciously or unconsciously convey to girls the importance of their appearance, and girls may therefore intensify their focus on their own appearance, resulting in unnecessary appearance anxiety, psychological depression and other negative behaviours. This means that the parent's own lack of image education has a tendency to sexualise the child to a certain extent and can have a negative impact on the girl. It is important for parents to be able to recognise when girls in their lives are being sexualised, and if they are unable to do so, they should educate themselves on their own body image in a timely manner. By becoming more informed about the negative effects and characteristics of the sexualisation of children, parents will be better equipped to identify and address these issues appropriately. This will enable them to communicate more effectively and healthily with their children in the future and help them to grow up healthily.

4.2 Laws and Regulations on Fashion Media Industry Regulations

Industry-standard regulations for advertising agencies are indispensable. The ethics of the industry in the production of advertising content can be regulated by law. In Spain, the Congress has regulated the industry for advertising agencies through the proposal. "To convey the need for advertising and communication companies to produce advertising content respecting gender equality and avoiding all sexist advertising" and "to promote measures to raise public awareness of the risks of early sexualisation of children" [9]. The legal binding force of these proposals could regulate industry standards for advertising agencies. At the same time, when implementing industry standards, advertising agencies need to provide relevant training to their employees. Employees, as the people who are exposed to the production of advertising

content, are the ones who can consciously avoid the use of child-sexualised content and elements in the production of content. Reinforcing employee practices can fundamentally reduce the amount of child-sexualised content in advertising. These practical constraints can increase staff awareness and awareness of sexualised girly elements and can avoid sexualised girly elements in the production of advertising. To combat the sexualisation of young girls, it is recommended to avoid allowing them to wear clothing that is meant for adults and designed to be sexy. Advertising should also refrain from using sexually provocative gestures, such as having young girls open their mouths or spread their legs. Additionally, any sexually suggestive language should be avoided in advertising copy. These measures can help protect the well-being and development of young girls by reducing their exposure to sexual objectification. With the legal regulation of the industry, there will be an upward trend in advertising content that conveys a childlike, innocent image of children. This in turn will convey a positive image of the underage in society and reduce the tendency to sexualise girls.

4.3 Active Social Awareness by Relevant Organisations

Active social communication can be effective in raising public awareness of the image of girls in advertising. In terms of social communication, forums should be convened to bring together members of the media and a panel of leading experts in the field to examine and discuss ways to reduce the negative portrayal of girls in the media [4]. By bringing together the relevant people, it will be possible to examine and verify the elements of the sexualisation of girls in media advertising in society. A relevant scientific study can also be produced to prepare knowledge for further social communication. On the other hand, age-appropriate multimedia educational resources for parents, educators, healthcare providers and community organisations should be developed to help facilitate effective dialogue about the sexualisation of girls and its impact on girls [4]. Multimedia links to the layers of parents, educators, health care and community organisations, effectively expanding from the base unit of the 'family' to the community level of 'social organisations'. This allows for multi-layered, wide-ranging dissemination of knowledge about the healthy image of the girl child and the negative effects of the sexualisation of the girl child and can effectively counteract sexualised girl child-related advertising.

5 Conclusion

This study has found that sexualised media advertising has multiple negative impacts. This paper has detailed the case, starting from two fashion media advertisements with huge social reverse, namely Parisienne and Jiangnan Cloth. A detailed analysis is also provided in the negative impact. Among the psychological and behavioural changes in girls, girls tend to sexualise themselves and develop lower self-esteem. On the part of the parents, lower academic expectations are formed for the girl child. In terms of paedophile culture, it can contribute to the spread of inappropriate culture and further

promote the sexualisation of girls. In society, cyber-bullying of girls who dress inappropriately and the advertising media industry will further use sexualised girl models to drive branded products. In the face of these negative influences, there are appropriate solutions; for example, in terms of laws and regulations, restrictions on the advertising industry can be enacted to strengthen the ethics of those working in the advertising industry. In terms of psychological education and prevention, schools can start relevant psychological education courses, and parents can establish a correct educational concept and communicate effectively with their children. In terms of social organisation and publicity, social awareness campaigns can be conducted and popularised, and professionals can be strengthened to judge the phenomenon of the sexualisation of girls. In the future, research could be carried out to test the effectiveness of these measures in real-time and to give a professional assessment. This will help to reduce the sexualisation of girls in advertising and help them to have a healthy childhood and grow up happily. However, this paper still has some limitations. The measures proposed in this paper need further results from practice. Practice and proof are still limited. It is hoped that future research will focus further on the implementation of the measures.

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