

Thinking  
about sex  
in a highly  
sexualised  
society



**In our society, sex often seems to be the main thing, or even the only thing. How do Christians respond?**

# SEXUALISATION

We live in a highly sexualised society. During the last 50 or so years, sex has become part of ordinary discussion in both academic and popular culture. It's steadily become more and more normal to see, hear, talk about, and think about, sex. Advertising, movies, video games, TV shows and pop music lyrics feature sexual themes. Magazines feature articles instruct us how to feel sexual and how to perform sexual acts.

All of this impacts how we see ourselves. More and more, we take for granted that to be a normal, healthy person, we deserve to be sexually satisfied. This has two results. First, we evaluate ourselves according to our sexuality. Our sexual desirability and performance become more and more important; everything else about us – our athleticism, artistic creativity, intelligence, craftsmanship, relational sensitivity, kindness, courage – become less and less important. Secondly, we take for granted that we have the right to define what it means for me to 'be sexually satisfied'. No-one outside me has the right to tell me who I am sexually, or how to conduct myself sexually – least of all 'God' or 'the church'. Anyone who tries to stop me from achieving sexual satisfaction – whatever that means for me – is at best old-fashioned, and at worst downright oppressive and evil.

### A DEFINITION

‘Sexualisation’ involves social and cultural forces which influence and shape us, and to the reception and appropriation of those influences in our lives. As a social process, sexualisation involves being inappropriately defined by a sexual identity. The process involves the various socio-cultural influences – the advertising, pop music, TV shows and the rest – which shape individual and communal sexual attitudes, values and processes. Think of young girls dressed as if they are twenty year olds heading to a night club to pick up boys, or a film clip which presents the rippling chest and abdomen of a young guy with not face shown, so no identity. The other side of sexualisation is when we take on the theme of this cultural message and start to see ourselves, our lives and our relationships as defined by our sexuality and sexual activity. People see themselves, and each other, more and more as purely sexual beings, and less and less as anything else. Sexualisation involves a the cultural process and its affects on us.



### THE PROCESS:

#### SEXUALISING INFLUENCES

This intense focus on sexuality is implicitly embedded in many of the messages in popular media. A teen magazine that features articles about makeup, fashion, and looking and feeling ‘hot’ may not explicitly say “the only way to be a normal teen girl is to be sexually attractive to men”; but that message is implied by the content of the articles.

Some recent pop culture has ditched the subtlety. In many music videos, women, wearing provoca-

tive, revealing clothing, dance and pose in sexually suggestive ways. The lyrics of many pop songs refer to women primarily as sex objects. Some of these lyrics refer to sexuality in such crude and vulgar language as to be unrepeatable here.

THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR: A WOMAN'S VALUE  
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FOR A MAN.

Some recent pop songs overtly present sexuality in a mystical, quasi-religious way – they present a gospel of sexual redemption. For example: in his 2012 song *Locked Out Of Heaven*, Bruno Mars sings that “your sex takes me to paradise”.<sup>1</sup> The cover for the single features the torso of woman wearing a dress with a plunging neckline, with a key on a necklace dangling low on her chest.<sup>2</sup> The picture does not show the woman’s face; the focus is entirely on the sexual elements of her body. The message is clear: a woman’s value and purpose is to be a sex goddess for a man.

Sexualisation is inextricably linked with the pornography industry. A simple definition of porn is: any material – visual, written, auditory – which is produced with the intention of sexually stimulating the person who uses it. Porn, by definition, sexualises its subjects, focussing on their sexual characteristics to the exclusion of everything else about them, and often representing them as sexually available.

Some recent psychological studies have confirmed that pornography invites us to view other people as if they are not really human. One study showed that when some men viewed sexually provocative pictures of women, the part of the brain which was stimulated was not the part



usually associated with perceiving another person. Other studies showed that when people saw pictures of sexually dressed women they thought of them as more like animals, lacking human traits such as morality and emotional warmth.<sup>3</sup>

Porn used to be difficult to access because one had to go into a shop and actually purchase a magazine or video. Now, it's readily available over the internet and mobile devices, for free. And porn is no longer an exclusively male product. More and more women are consuming 'literary' porn – highly eroticised fiction, which is exclusively textual, and has few or no visual images, but still focuses exclusively on sexuality.

Some would argue that this focus on female sexuality actually empowers women, giving them control and status over men. Isn't Bruno Mars worshipping the woman as his sex goddess, his feminine Messiah? But this is both naïve, and, from a Christian perspective, a tragic corruption of power and status. It is naïve because, as we'll review below, sexualisation makes women vulnerable, not powerful. And it is tragic because, Biblically speaking, God intended sex to be a way of bringing man and woman together, not using and manipulating each other.

Sexualisation may not always involve pornography, but it tends to view people in pornographic terms. It operates in a murky zone in which people are presented in the media as sexual objects. In turn this trains us to view ourselves, and others, the same way.

## THE RESULT: GENERATION SEX

Secular research has documented the negative effects of sexualisation on mental and physical well-being. Normal, healthy young women may develop a negative body image – a constant sense that they're too fat, don't have the right body shape, aren't beautiful enough. They suffer from eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia), and general low self-esteem or depression. They feel pressured to engage in 'sexting' – taking sexually explicit photographs of themselves and texting it to their boyfriends – because they're convinced that's the only way to keep the boys 'loving' them. And young men develop unrealistic expectations of women's bodies and sexual abilities, which affects their ability to enjoy actual sex with a real woman. Both men and women develop

tolerance towards sexual violence, accepting it as normal.<sup>4</sup>



High rates of sexual activity mean that sexually transmissible infections (STIs) among youth are at an all-time high. Particularly concerning is the rise in chlamydia, a disease that is mostly symptomless – so people do not know they have it – but that makes women infertile. From 2007 to 2011, the incidence of this disease among people aged 20-29 increased from 28,729 to 43,987 – an increase of 53%; and the incidence among people aged 15-19 increased from 12,719 to 21,663 – an increase of 70%.<sup>5</sup>





## THE CORE ISSUE:

## MATERIALISTIC HEDONISM

Sexualisation capitalises on the assumption that humanity, the world, and all of reality, is ultimately only physical. It's a worldview called *materialism* – not as in chasing more and more money, but the assumption that there is no reality beyond physical matter.

Philosophical materialism assumes that there is no 'real' supernatural world. All reality is accessible to our five senses. If we can't see, touch, taste, smell or hear it – whatever 'it' is – then it's not really real. It is, at best, something created by the material world. Sure, we have feelings, like falling in love. But those feelings have various biological and neurological causes, so they're not actually 'real'; they're just the secondary results of the way our bodies happened to evolve. Social institutions like marriage evolved to give families the best chance of surviving so as to pass on human DNA to the next generation.

ALL OF LIFE BECOMES A BUCKET LIST – A DESPERATE SEARCH TO HAVE AS MUCH FUN AS POSSIBLE BEFORE WE DIE.

If ultimate reality is defined by what our senses can access, then the goal of existence is to maximise our sensory stimulation – that is, pleasure, or *hedonism*. All of life becomes a bucket list – a desperate search to have as much fun as possible before we die. In this worldview, sex is often viewed as the greatest physical pleas-

ure and satisfaction. Life becomes a search for maximum sexual satisfaction and all of life and society become sexualised. Human beings become sex incarnate.

We can see this in another quasi-religious, erotic pop song. Robbie Williams' song 'bodies' carries a wistful longing:

All we've ever wanted  
is to look good naked,  
hope that someone can take it;  
God save me rejection  
from my reflection;  
I want perfection.<sup>6</sup>

And that's because bodies are all that exist: "bodies making chemistry... bodies in the cemetery... [is] the way it's gonna be".<sup>7</sup>

## RESPONDING TO SEXUALISATION

*The gospel contradicts materialistic hedonism and reorients us towards God*

The Christian faith challenges the root cause of sexualisation, because it rejects materialistic hedonism. We know that while the physical world is good and real, there is a supernatural reality beyond it, populated by angels, demons, and, of course, the Triune God himself. This God became flesh in Christ Jesus – he entered this physical world. But he did not live for pleasure in this world – he lived for his Father, and served others, even to the extent of giving himself as a sacrifice in the place of sinners. We do not, and cannot, know the meaning and purpose of our human life, purely from inspecting the world: we need our creator God to tell us, through divine revelation. And we have this divine revelation in Christ — the word of God incarnate — and the Bible — the written word of God.

The gospel demands that we repent of our materialism — that we recognise that, while the physical, natural world is good (1 Tim 6:13), God is of greater eternal significance. The creation, both material and spiritual, natural and supernatural, is the realm in which we are to serve God, not just please ourselves — just like Christ did not please himself, but patiently bore our

WE ARE NOT MERELY PHYSICAL BODIES, WE  
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insults (Rom 15:3). This repentance saves us – not only from the wrath of a holy God, but from captivity to physical pleasure. We're not merely physical bodies, with our highest value being physical pleasure; we are relational beings, in the image of the Triune God. We're not fundamentally defined by what our peers, or lover, thinks about us; we're defined, first and foremost, by the attitude that God has towards us, in Christ. And when we come in faith to the one who died for his enemies, he justifies us, and adopts us to be his children. God's salvation re-orientates us to find the true goal of our existence. So the starting point for a Christian response to sexualisation is the gospel. When we magnify God in Christ by proclaiming what he has done, we find our orientation for thinking about our world and living properly.

The gospel demonstrates that sexualisation is tragic because it doesn't give us a big enough vision of what it means to be truly human. At the beginning of this paper, we defined sexualisation as focusing 'too much' on sexuality. That begs the question: what's the 'right' amount of focus? There are four significant Biblical themes that help us understand the place of our sexuality in God's broader plans for us, humanity, and the world: (1) humanity in God's image; (2) sex as a relational, not just physical, way of being and acting; (3) Jesus' interactions with women; and (4) sexuality in the New Testament church.

## MORE TO LIFE THAN SEX:

### HUMANITY IN GOD'S IMAGE

Biblically speaking, all humans are valuable because we are in God's image. Being sexual is part of being in God's image; but there's a lot more to it than that.

#### *Sex is good*

Sexuality is one aspect of the image of God. God made humanity male and female (Gen 1:27), and commanded them to be fruitful and fill the earth (Gen 1:28). Adam and Eve are the model marital pair, united as one flesh, unashamedly naked before each other (Gen 2:24-25). Song of Songs is full of romantic longing, erotic descriptions of the two lover's physical bodies, and poetic descriptions of the sensual delights of sexual activity. The Apostle Paul commands married couples not to deprive each other of sex, but to give themselves to each

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other (1 Cor 7:2-5). So, being sexual, feeling sexual, and enjoying sex, are all good gifts, from the hand of our good, kind, generous creator God, intended by God for our well-being.

#### *There's more to life than sex*

However, sexuality is only *one* aspect of imaging God, of being human. Gen 1-2 demonstrate that God's purpose in making humanity was that they would rule the world (Gen 1:26-28), or tend it, 'cultivate' it (Gen 2:5, 15). Even after the fall into sin, humanity retains creative ability, including construction (Cain, Gen 4:17); animal husbandry (Jabal, Gen 4:20), music (Jubal, Gen 4:21) and metalwork (Tubal-Cain, Gen 4:22). God endowed various people with craftsmanship to build the tabernacle and temple (Ex 31:1-6, 35:30-36:2; 1 Ki 7:13-14). Some priests acted as temple musicians (1 Chron 9:32-33). The wife



of noble character, the personification of Wisdom, is a worker, labouring with her hands, and a merchant, trading in goods and land (Prov 31:10-31). King David wrote and sang psalms – he was “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam 23:1). Jesus himself was a carpenter (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3); Paul, Priscilla and Aquila tentmakers (Acts 18:3). These are all different ways of imaging God – of contributing to society and the world, ruling and cultivating the world, in relationship with each other.

Sexualisation reduces us, and everyone around us, to nothing more than a potential sexual partner. If we're not having 'good sex', then we're

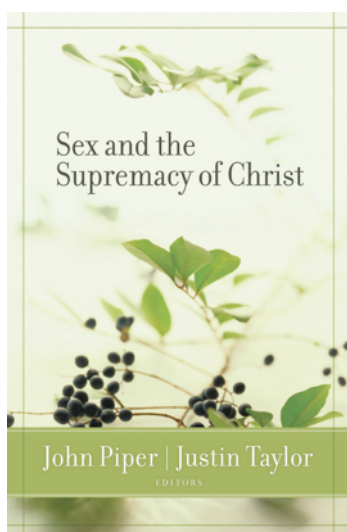
not really living. And if the people around us aren't 'sexy', they're not much use to us. So what does that mean for us as we get older, and it becomes more and more difficult to remain trim, taut and terrific? What if we suffer some disability, injury, or disease, which leaves us disfigured, or unable to perform sexually? What happens to the identity and meaning of people who are widowed or divorced? What about the other things that we're good at, and enjoy participating in – like music, food, art, literature, gardening, sport, and a host of other activities? If all we are is sexual, then we lose our value very quickly. We're no use anymore; we might as well die.

But God wants us to see ourselves, and everyone else, as so much more than that. He wants all people to fully inhabit, and enjoy, *all* aspects of being a full, productive human – not just sexuality. There's more to life than sex.

### MORE TO SEX THAN SEX:

#### SEX IS A RELATIONAL ACTIVITY

Furthermore: sexuality is more than just physical erotic pleasure: it is a relational act of entrusting oneself completely, 'body and soul', to another person, trusting them to protect and cherish you. Gen 2:24-25 places sex within the relational context of committed monogamous heterosexual marriage. A marriage stands in the middle of Song of Songs (Song 3:11). Jesus affirms marriage (Matt 19:4-6), and Paul uses it as a metaphor for the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:22-33).



Therefore, Biblical sexuality is not just a different way of acting – it's a different way of thinking about sexuality; a different way of *being* sexual. My sexuality is 'mine', in the sense of being an irreducible part of being human, as we noted above. But it's *not* 'mine', in the sense of being simply my possession, to do whatever I want with. My sexuality is mine, *for* the two beings I have promised myself to – God in heaven, and my spouse on earth. God gave sex to be enjoyed between a heterosexual married couple. Outside of that, we are to think and act in a *chaste* manner. 'Chastity' does not mean ignoring, being ashamed of, or suppressing our sexuality. It simply means not deliberately engaging our sexuality – neither thinking, nor behaving, in a sexual manner – because we recognise that active sexuality is not appropriate in the particular context we are in. It doesn't deny sex is good, but recognises that it is a good gift for the proper setting of a committed marriage.



Sexualisation totally ignores relationships, and reduces sexuality to performance. We value ourselves, and each other, according to how much erotic satisfaction we are able to give and receive. This reduces all of us to little more than sex toys. But God intends sex to be so much more than this. He wants it to be a deeply personal act of giving oneself to someone whom you trust completely, because they have promised to care for you: Christ in heaven, and your spouse on earth. There is more to sex than sex.



### MORE TO CHRIST THAN SEX:

#### JESUS AND SEXUALITY

Jesus is the best example of sexual chastity – that is, of recognising the goodness of sexuality; not using it as the main basis for valuing people; but regarding it as something fragile, to be honoured and protected, not exploited.

We can see this in the way Jesus related to the sexually broken women he interacted with. He refused to condemn the ‘sinful’ woman who anointed his feet; instead, he used her as an example of the loving, worshipful response to his forgiveness (Luke 7:37-50). He knew that the woman at the well was a serial adulteress, yet invited her to recognise him as the Christ, the saviour of the world, who gives eternal life (John 4:1-42). So he recognised that these women were sexual beings, and that they had used their sexuality in ungodly ways. Yet he refused to identify them *primarily* according to their sexuality. Instead, he saw them as broken, vulnerable

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people, in need of his love and protection. Their sexuality was a part – not the only part, but *a* part – of that brokenness and vulnerability, which he redeemed.

We can also see this chaste honouring of sexuality in the way the Bible uses marriage and sexuality as a metaphor for his relationship with his

people. As our heavenly bridegroom, Jesus lays down his life for his bride (Eph 5:25-26). He does not evaluate us according to how useful we can be to him – in sex, or anything else. On the contrary, he gives himself for us – all the way to death on the cross.

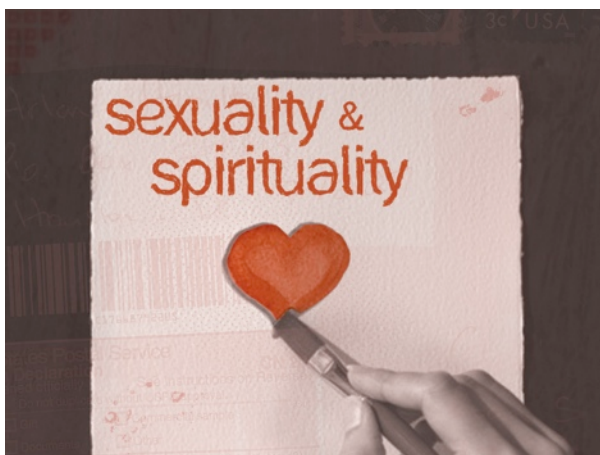
Having betrothed us to himself, he calls us to be faithful to him like a “pure virgin” (2 Cor 11:2b). The analogy compares devotion to Jesus as Lord with a woman’s sexual fidelity to her husband-to-be. It assumes that it is normal for a woman to reserve her sexuality for her husband-to-be, and uses that faithfulness, that ‘reservation’, as a metaphor of reserving divine worship for Christ alone. The metaphor only works if sex is actually good, but not meant primarily for personal pleasure, but as an act of personal self-giving within the relationship of marriage.



Sexualisation sucks life out of us and brings death upon us, because of the unrelenting pressure to achieve, or maintain, physical beauty and sexual performance. Jesus gives himself to death so that we can enjoy life eternal. And in his self-giving, he gives us a model of sexual chastity: honouring sexuality as a good thing, not intended primarily for personal pleasure, but to serve and care for our marriage partner.

#### *More to church than sex*

The church, as the community of those who are ‘in Christ’, is the forge of godliness – it is the place where we constantly reform ourselves, and each other, to be more and more Christlike. And this means being counter-cultural – especially in the area of sexuality. We are to “avoid sexual immorality” and “control” our “own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God” (1 Thess 4:3-5). “Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure” (Heb 13:4). The pagans around us, who live “in de-



bauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry”, will “think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and” will “heap abuse on you” (1 Peter 4:3-4). So be it. This is an aspect of modern-day martyrdom – of what it means to take up our cross and follow Christ, in the midst of a world that hates us because it hated him first (John 15:18).

But, as we reform our sexual identity and practices to be more and more Christ-like, we will actually be living good, healthy, harmonious lives, in tune with the inbuilt relational and physical patterns designed by our creator. And maybe – just maybe – the world will see our health and harmony, and change to also be more in tune with the creator’s purposes. The hardships of Christian counter-cultural sexual chastity may save the world from sexual self-destruction.

## FACIING A SEXUALISED CULTURE

### *Everyone*

Sexualisation reduces us to looking sexy. So the best way to work against it is to refuse to be dictated by how you look. Take the time to develop all other aspects of your self – sports, study, arts etc. Don’t ignore your body – but don’t be obsessed by it.

Dress plays an important role in sexualisation: the advertising, pop music, movies, and all the other socio-cultural processes of sexualisation ‘train’ us to think of revealing, figure-hugging clothing as not just ‘attractive’ or ‘fashionable’, but as ‘sexy’ – as displaying our sexual potential, so that everyone around us admires us. So, we need to think about how we dress. When Bible commends modest dress, it is referring primarily to dress that was sexually provocative and marked a woman as a rich, sexually liberated wife (1Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3). So these instructions relate directly to sexualisation. They do not mean that Christians must dress in a way that is intentionally unattractive, unfashionable or ‘daggy’. They do mean that we need to think about whatever our preferred style and ask about the message it sends. What does it say about sexuality? Care with dress is one way of women in the Christian community being loving to men, who tend to be more easily visually stimulated.

Make up your mind to not be influenced by, or engage in, sexualising behaviour. Avoid porn; don’t engage in lewd talk; ignore the sexy magazines. If your friends are doing it, just walk away. If they mock you – let them.

Church, youth group, Bible study, and other ministries and fellowships are the perfect environment to develop Biblically healthy patterns of sexual thought and behaviour. Learn to relate to the opposite gender in a manner that respects and honours them. Learn to appreciate them, admire them, for everything that they are – their intellect, their skills, their character – not just their ‘looks’. In these ministries and fellowships, talk about how to do everything we suggested above, in your particular situation. How can we teach our children about sex? What does it mean to dress nice but modest? Share the hurts that happen when you get mocked for being sexually dignified.

### *Parents*

Don’t be afraid to be parents! Set boundaries of acceptable dress and behaviour for your children. But don’t just leave it at that: give them a deep value system that undergirds those boundaries. Tell them that bodily beauty is good – and connect that goodness with dignity and modesty, not exhibitionism and voyeurism. And start early. It’s never too early for age-appropriate teaching concerning the goodness, and fragility, of bodily sexuality.<sup>8</sup>

Be aware of what your children are doing and watching. Watch TV shows with them; keep an eye on their social media use; and debrief with





them about what they've seen, how they've acted and reacted, and why.

### *Ministers, elders and other church leaders*

As church leaders, your personal conduct and attitude rubs off on the people you are leading. You are a 'public' example of Christian living. It's an inextricable part of your role. So: what is *your* attitude to sexuality – your own, and those around you? How are *you* going in reforming your thoughts, attitudes, and actions concerning sexuality, according to the Bible, to be more and more Christ-like? As you grow, so will your people; if you stagnate or decline, so will they.

If you are caught in unhealthy patterns of thought or action, *seek help*.<sup>9</sup> Do not be afraid; do not be ashamed. We are all fallen people, vulnerable to all manner of temptations. It is good for a church to know that their leaders have honestly faced their problems, and are steadily dealing with them. This sets a powerful example of truthfulness, which encourages church members to also confess their own problems, and set about dealing with them. The other option is to hide our problems, get used to being a hypocrite – nice on the outside while steadily rotting on the inside – and eventually become the next pastoral disaster.

As you preach and teach and lead Bible studies, help your people draw the connections between the Trinity, creation, Christ's incarnation, his death and resurrection – and our being embodied beings with sexual potential. Help your people, especially your youth, see the goodness of embodied sexuality – but also that there is so much more to life than sex.

Remember that everyone in your church, young and old, are influenced by all the socio-cultural processes of sexualisation. Help them recognise the sexualising messages implicit in these cultural influences – movies, TV, ads, billboards, games, social media; what their peers are doing and saying and sharing. Help them plan strategies for being deliberately sexually counter-cultural. And prepare them for the misunderstanding and mockery that'll come with it.

Talk to the leaders of the youth ministry at church about the issues of sexualisation, how it impacts teenagers and the kind of culture the youth group should promote. Think about how

you can teach and model healthy, godly sexuality for teenagers whose lives are awash with all sorts of messages about sex. Help the youth leaders to see that their relationships and example will be very powerful.

The topics of sex, sexuality and relationships lend themselves to careful, practical discussion across the generations. Why not organise some events where older women and younger women in your church can learn from each other about some of the challenges they face in this area and encourage each other. Similarly, encourage honest discussion with guys of different ages about sexual temptation, pornography and relationships. The Biblical pattern of older women and men teaching younger people and setting them an example is key in this area (Tit 2:1-8).

### *Advocacy*

There are several organisations in Australia which are working to limit sexualisation in the culture. They campaign against inappropriate advertising, children's clothing and toys, raising raise issues with the appropriate authorities. Because sexualisation is a commercial issue, it is often possible to tell retailers directly that you object to some of their products and that you won't be shopping with them and you will be encouraging your friends to do the same. Organisations such as Collective Shout ([collectiveshout.org](http://collectiveshout.org)) and Kids Free 2B Kids (<http://www.kf2bk.com>) can let you know about current campaigns and help you know how to raise issues you are concerned about.



### Recommended Resources

- C. Ash, *Married for God: Making Your Marriage the Best It Can Be* (IVP, 2007), ch 4
- Andrew J. B. Cameron, *Joined-up Life: A Christian Account of How Ethics Works*, (IVP, 2011), 288-93.
- Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: an evangelical perspective* (Westminster John Knox, 1997)
- Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality : Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis*, (Crossway, 2004)
- Dennis P. Hollinger, *The Meaning Of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* (Baker, 2009)
- Stan and Brenna Jones, *God's Design for Sex Series, Book 1: The Story of Me* (Navpress, 2007, rev. ed.)
- Stan and Brenna Jones, *God's Design for Sex Series, Book 3: What's the Big Deal? Why God Cares About Sex* (Navpress, 2007, rev. ed.)
- Stan and Brenna Jones, *God's Design for Sex Series, Book 4: Facing the Facts: The Truth About Sex and You* (Navpress, 2007, rev. ed.)
- Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power--and the Only Hope That Matters*, (Dutton, 2009), 22-47
- Dale Kuehne, *Sex and the iWorld*, (Baker, 2009)
- Carolyn Nystrom, *God's Design for Sex Series, Book 2: Before I Was Born*, (Navpress, 2007, rev. ed.)
- Linda Papadopoulos, *Sexualisation of Young People Review* (UK Govt, 2010)
- John Piper & Justin Taylor, eds. *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, (Crossway, 2005)
- Gordon Preece, "Sex and the City of God: a Narrative Theology of Sexuality in the Context of Creation, Fall and Redemption" *Zadok Paper* S125 (Winter 2003).
- Emma Rush & Andrea La Nauze *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of Children in Australia*, (The Australia Institute Discussion Paper 90, 2006)
- Melinda Tankard Riest, ed. *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls* (Spinifex Press, 2009)
- Patricia Weerakoon, *Teen Sex By The Book* (Fervr, 2012)
- Eileen Zurbriggen et. al. *APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*, (APA, 2010)

#### Websites

- <http://collectiveshout.org/>
- <http://fervr.net/teen-life/dating-sex/>
- <http://www.christiansexed.com>
- <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents-sex-ed-center-home>

## One mum's complaint starts an online protest

In August 2012, Ana Amini, who is part of Port Macquarie Presbyterian Church, saw that her local Target was selling children's clothes which sexualised young girls, like her eight year-old daughter. She thought they made girls "look like tramps" and were "not healthy for young girls".

So Ana went to Target's Facebook page and registered her complaint: "Dear Target, Could you possibly make a range of clothing for girls 7-14 years that doesn't make them look like tramps ...



You have lost me as a customer when buying apparel for my daughter as I don't want her thinking shorts up her backside are the norm or fashionable". Her post was backed up by hundreds of similar comments and over 50,000 likes! Soon she had national media attention.

Her aim was to give some feedback to Target, but her comments touched a nerve and became the catalyst for a spontaneous online campaign. Target responded on facebook to say that "We always appreciate your feedback on our

childrens wear range. In most cases, before products are available at Target, they are reviewed and assessed by a panel of our customers and their feedback is incorporated into our design decisions. We know there is a huge diversity of opinion when it comes to children's clothing which is why we believe in taking great care in ensuring that our range is both age appropriate and something that your kids will love".

Ana's conclusion at the end of the episode was "I really am hoping they [Target] stop and think about the clothes they are selling to people," she said. "It's not little kids' clothing. They're made for teenagers.". It isn't clear that Target have changed their clothing lines, however actions like Ana's are a way to remind all retailers that many customers don't like sexualised clothing. It is interesting that year's range of girls clothes at Target seemed far more age appropriate.

Looking back a year later Ana says that "Despite some regret in causing a media frenzy, and causing myself stress, I am glad that I expressed my opinion. I am quite happy to wear the 'old fashioned' badge if it means I show my children how to have self respect, modesty and integrity".





Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.metrolyrics.com/locked-out-of-heaven-lyrics-bruno-mars.html>.

<sup>2</sup> [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/1/13/Bruno\\_Mars\\_-\\_Locked\\_Out\\_of\\_Heaven.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/1/13/Bruno_Mars_-_Locked_Out_of_Heaven.jpg). **VIEWER DISCRETION RECOMMENDED!**

<sup>3</sup> For details for the studies see <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-big-questions/201008/sexualized-women-are-seen-objects-studies-find>

<sup>4</sup> Linda Papadopoulos, *Sexualisation of Young People Review*, UK Govt, 2010: 55-63; Emma Rush & Andrea La Nauze, *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of children in Australia*, The Australia Institute Discussion Paper 90, 2006: 35-46; Eileen Zurbriggen et. al., *APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*, American Psychological Association, 2010: 20-34.

<sup>5</sup> Ann McDonald, ed., *HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexually Transmissible Infections in Australia Annual Surveillance Report 2012*, Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales: 15, 69.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.metrolyrics.com/bodies-lyrics-robbie-williams.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> *Teen Sex By the Book* <http://www.cepstore.com.au/p/591/teen-sex-by-the-book> is a new resource Australian Christian Sexologist Dr. Patricia Weerakoon. It has associated resources at <http://fervr.net>. Christian Sex Education Resources <http://www.christiansexed.com> is produced by American Evangelical psychologist, and Provost of Wheaton College, Stanton Jones. The Parent's Sex Ed Centre <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents-sex-ed-center-home> is a useful secular site.

<sup>9</sup> It would be best to talk to another ministry leader, within your church, Presbytery, or other ministry networks, with whom you have a long-term relationship of trust. The Presbyterian Social Services Counselling hotline is 1800 818 133. Free call within NSW.



The Gospel, Society and Culture committee aims to provide resources which are faithful to Scripture, relevant to the life and mission of the church, engaged with contemporary Australian culture and informed by careful research. Resource Papers aim to be consistent with the confessional position of the Presbyterian Church of Australia and to reflect positions on social issues expressed by the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in NSW. They have not been approved by the Assembly and so do not represent the official view of the Presbyterian Church of NSW.

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The initial research and writing for this Resource Paper was conducted by Kamal Weerakoon.

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