

**Submission
No 37**

SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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Submission to the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council

Inquiry into Sexualisation of Children and Young People

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Preface

This submission is a presentation of the way Australian children are impacted by sexualised imagery, media and teaching practices within dance education. Having been heavily involved in the industry for 20 years (8 of these working professionally), I have witnessed firsthand the processes and impacts of children, particularly girls and young women, experiencing an imposition of hyper-sexualised messages in a variety of detrimental measures. These include (yet are not limited to) exposure to adultified choreography, costuming, music, language, mass media influence and social media trends.

Marika Tiggemann and fellow researcher, Amy Slater, from Flinders University in Adelaide, were the first to document the appearance-obsessed behaviours of young Australian girls in their June 2014 study: 'Contemporary Girlhood: Maternal Reports on Sexualised Behaviour and Appearance in 4-10 year-old girls'. Results showed that girls aged four to 10-years-old are prematurely engaging with teen culture, and exhibiting hyper-sexualised behaviours through attention to personal grooming, clothing and bodily appearance. The study assessed the activities favoured and participated in most by girls of this age - with dance surpassing all, at a staggering 96%.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported in April 2012 that 727,000 girls aged five to 14 years participated in an organised sport outside of school. Of this figure, 418,000 were enrolled in a dance school (58 percent), up from 390,400 in 2009. Participation in dance education is increasing by annual increments of tens of thousands, with dance studios and in-school dance programs now one of the most common public spaces you will find a young Australian girl.

There are currently over 100 global reports and findings published on the way sexualised messages are impacting cultural norms, and affecting the healthy development of children. It is imperative that we address this issue by assessing and strengthening the surroundings in which children are most commonly positioned, one of them evidently being, the dance classroom. Dance educators, therefore, have a prolific responsibility of engaging with this issue and actively safeguarding not only the physical, however the mental and emotional wellbeing of all children within their care.

In 2015, I wrote an extended feature article and two follow up articles on this issue, that were published online and collectively reached over 200,000 views nationwide. With supporting media commentary from esteemed psychologists Steve Biddulph and Michael Carr Greg, and coverage from ABC Radio National, 2UE, Mamamia and more, the works were said to have generated the largest and most widespread discussion so far on the state of children's dance education in Australia. The issue was on the public agenda for a number of months, hence my belief in the need for this to be discussed further at a Parliamentary and regulatory level.

Children's dance education is, quite possibly, the most unregulated child-related industry in the country. Detrimental consequences of the industry's self-regulatory state are currently being outworked in the public hearing and sentencing of prominent Sydney dance teacher Grant Davies (see *Term of Reference IV*). Child pornography, sexual abuse and pedophilia are surely the most disastrous consequences of self-regulation that we are seeing in the industry today, as is currently being investigated by the Royal Commission.

My main recommendation to the Inquiry (Pg 6) is the implementation of a dance education policy, or 'Code of Practice', that combats the issues present in children's dance education and offers increased protection and security for our young people. Such a policy does not exist. A governing authority to implement this policy in environments *external to* public schools dance education does not exist, and the Department of Education do not have a dance-specific policy in place for in-school programs. Until this day arrives on both accounts, myself along with a committee have launched an incorporated association to bring a proposed policy to the Australian community. With signatories including Public School principals and studio directors already waiting to become 'accredited' and affiliated to such an initiative, we know a policy such as what we have proposed is desired by the national community, and well over-due.

Through this submission, my hope is for the Inquiry to see the damage currently occurring as a result of an unregulated industry that is increasingly prone to devastating impacts from issues of sexualisation. However my hope is also for the Inquiry to see that change and transformation is possible, tangible, and is sincerely desired by Australian families.

Terms of Reference

Term of Reference i. The sexualisation of children and young people in electronic, print and social media and marketing

The sexualisation of children on social media platforms is a widespread issue throughout the dance industry - both here nationally, and abroad. I urge the Inquiry to read the **Appendices** attached, which report on this issue more extensively. As a summary, here are two case studies to bring to attention: the first relating to the sexualisation of girls in a popular dancewear company's online marketing strategy, with the second relating to a social media trend prevalent amongst young Australian dancers.

Case Study #1: California Kisses Dance Wear 'Pop That' advertising scandal

American dancewear label, California Kisses (CK), have a large following and customer base here in Australia. They were under the spotlight last year when the company's dangerous online malpractices were exposed. With a prevalent audience of Australian teenage girls, CK's Instagram profile (predominantly of child models advertising dance wear of a 'bra' and 'booty short' combination) attracted hundreds of pedophilic users who overtly expressed their sexual fantasies and gratification received from perusing CK's images. Online predators interacted publicly with teenage girl users on the CK Instagram page. The company did not respond to my email complaints nor those of many others who expressed outrage, rather, 'blocked' social media users who questioned the company online.

CK's problem advertisement, featured 3 teenage girls posed in dance wear with the words 'Pop That' superimposed over the top. The phrase 'pop that' is a popular, porn-inspired phrase relating to the 'popping', or taking, of a girls' virginity.



CK 'Pop That' advertisement



Child model in a CK French maid outfit

Please see *Appendices 2* for extended article on California Kisses.

Case Study #2: #tilttuesday

There are hundreds of thousands of image posts under the hashtag #tilttuesday. A 'tilt' is when a dancer extends their leg up to 180 degrees away, and tilts their torso slightly to one side, so the leg reaches maximum height and split. They grab hold of their ankle with both hands and push the pelvis forward, producing a distorted display of exposed body parts and accentuated focus on the groin area. Girls as young as eight (who legally should not even have an Instagram account) capture this position, caption, hashtag and post for the worldwide, weekly phenomenon of #tilttuesday. This has become the most popular online fad for young dancers who seek connection and approval of fellow dancers around the globe. Scroll through this hashtag feed and you will see, once again, online predators expressing their gratification from: "Love to f**k you in that position" to: "Wats poppin tonite??" to: "#wouldhit."

Please see *Appendices 1* for extended article on the #tilttuesday phenomenon, and the online dangers associated.

Term of Reference ii. The exposure of children and young people in NSW to sexualised images and content in public places, electronic, print and social media and marketing

Dance schools are highly connected in public places. From competitions and eisteddfods, to outdoor community events such as festivals, fairs, and the dance school's own concert, schools will make the most of public exposure through staging performances. Aside from providing experiences for their students to perform, it is an effective marketing tool in attracting new clientele. Through elements such as music, costuming and choreography choices, children and their families can be exposed to performances of a highly sexualised nature, depending on the choices made and culture of the studio. I've received many personal testimonies of male spectators in public performances by dance studios: fathers, grandfathers, brothers and uncles, who have expressed disdain and discomfort in what they've seen regarding public performances. I am able to assist in arranging for the Inquiry to hear these testimonies, should it be of interest.

Please see *Appendices 1* for extended article, assessment and testimonies on the sexualised content being presented in public spaces by dance studio organisations, particularly in the competition scene.

Term of Reference iii. The impact of children and young people of growing up in a sexualised culture

From body weight obsession and appearance dissatisfaction, to 'yo yo' dieting, eating disorders, anxiety and other poor mental health outcomes, social media dangers and more - there are a multitude of stories amongst the Australian dance community as to the impact on children and young people growing up in an environment that is highly sexualised. Although there are no 'dance-specific' statistics to back this, the evident links are certainly present through studies such as Marika Tiggemann and Amy Slater's (as referred to in the Preface, Pg 3). The most disastrous impact, as will be discussed further below, is consequentially the child sex abuse, grooming and pornography dissemination cases that have occurred within Australian dance studios in recent years.

Please see *Appendices 1* for extended article assessing the impact on Australian girls, containing personal testimonies surrounding mental health, body image/dissatisfaction and more.

Term of Reference iv. Adequacy of current measures at state and federal level to regulate sexualised imagery in electronic print and social media and marketing, and effectiveness of self-regulation measures

Children's dance education is an entirely self-regulated industry, with no governing authority or regulatory measures or requirements in place. There is no regulation of teacher's qualification and training nor *Working with Children* checks. Thousands of dance studios across the country exist, teeming with children, without any oversight or obligations at a Local, State or Federal level.

As mentioned in the Preface (pg 3), the most detrimental outworking of this self-regulation is surely occurring now in the upcoming sentencing of Grant Davies from *RG Dance*, who has recently pleaded guilty to 28 child pornography and sexual abuse charges. Another case occurred late last year, with Tasmanian dance teacher Adam Jose pleading guilty to offences concerning two female victims; including sexual intercourse and indecent text messages.

- *Information for Public Hearing Case Study 37: Centres for Performing Arts, Wednesday 2nd March:* <http://www.royalcommission.org.au/whats-happening.html>
- *ABC News, 20 October 2015, 'Abuse widespread in dance classes around Australia, eisteddfod boss says, amid calls for greater oversight':* <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-19/abuse-happening-daily-in-classes-around-australia-danceboss-says/6867322>
- *ABC News, 22 September 2015, 'Former dance teacher Grant Davies please guilty to child pornography, sex abuse charges':* <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-21/former-dance-teacher-pleads-guilty-child-sex-charges/6791752?site=sydney>

- *ABC News, 19th October 2015, 'Hobart dance teacher Adam Jose please guilty to child sex offences':*
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-19/hobart-dance-teacher-adam-jose-admits-child-sex-offences/6865268>

A new 'Molestation Cover' insurance package is now available for dance educators to purchase through *Aon* and *AusDance*. This is assumedly a reactionary move considering the child sexual abuse cases occurring within the industry. **It is incomprehensible to believe, however, that a policy to insure the defendant on molestation charges (innocent, or otherwise) would be implemented before a policy to insure a child's safety.**

There sadly are no current measures at State or Federal level to be able to deem 'adequate' or 'inadequate' for the purposes of this submission. I therefore urge the Inquiry to consider my recommendations below.

Recommendations

The optimum outcome and recommendation for the Inquiry to consider and assess, is the possibility of implementing a number of mandatory procedures that a dance educator and prospective business owner must meet in order to register a business name with the *Australian Securities and Investments Commission*. This would include, but not necessarily be limited to:

- An approved, and in-date, Working With Children Check
- An industry qualification (or proof of equivalent industry-level training)
- Signing to a 'Code of Practice' (proposed below) or some form of governing, child-safe policy to be implemented and adhered to by all who work and interact with young people within the organisation.
- The clear and public displaying of all staff members' WWCC numbers as well as signatory to the policy/Code of Practice, for families' utmost assurance and confidence (in the organisation building, information material/collateral, online or otherwise)

I urge the Inquiry to consider the model as set by South Australia's *Department for Education and Child Development*. It is obligatory for child-related organisations of any form, to submit to the Department a Child Safe Environment Compliance Statement. As quoted on the Department's website (link to view: <http://www.families.sa.gov.au/pages/protectingchildren/LodgeComplianceStatement/>):

"Under the Children's Protection Act 1993, all organisations that provide health, welfare, education, sporting or recreational, religious or spiritual, child-care or residential services wholly or partly to children must lodge a statement outlining their child safe environment policies and procedures with the Department for Education and Child Development (- Families SA)."

'KidsPace Code Incorporated' - PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

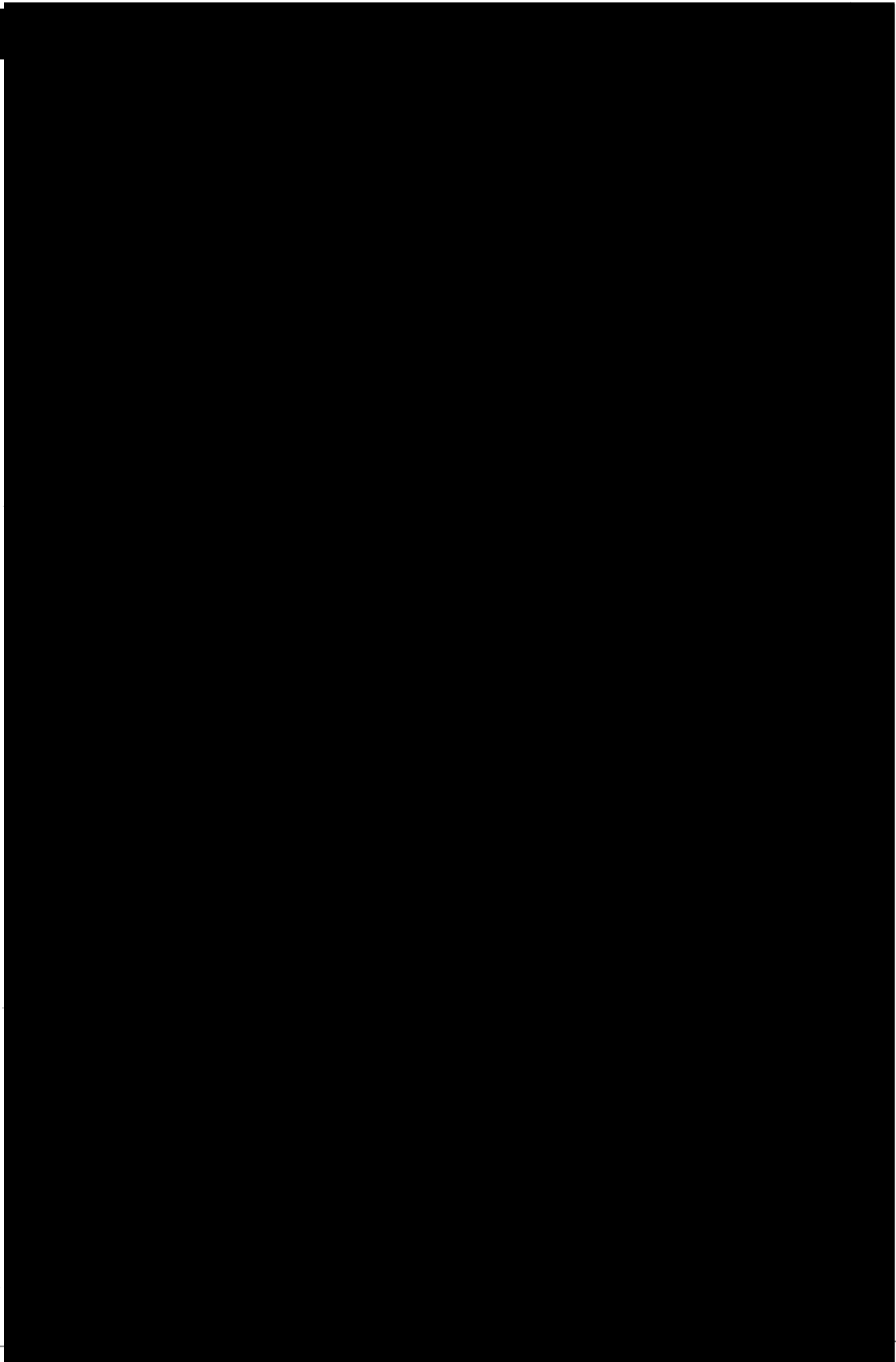
KidsPace Code (Inc.) was launched in NSW on Wednesday 2nd March 2016, in response to increasing support and demand from the Australian community to see a dance education policy written and implemented across the industry. The *KidsPace Dance Code of Practice*, endorsed by Steve Biddulph amongst other authorities, is in draft format and not available to the public as yet. In light of this, I kindly ask that the following pages - labelled 'KidsPace' - **be kept private and confidential**, and not be published online or forwarded to any parties external to the Inquiry committee. The KidsPace board is currently developing the procedures required for parties signing the code, as well as moderation upkeep and complaints processes.

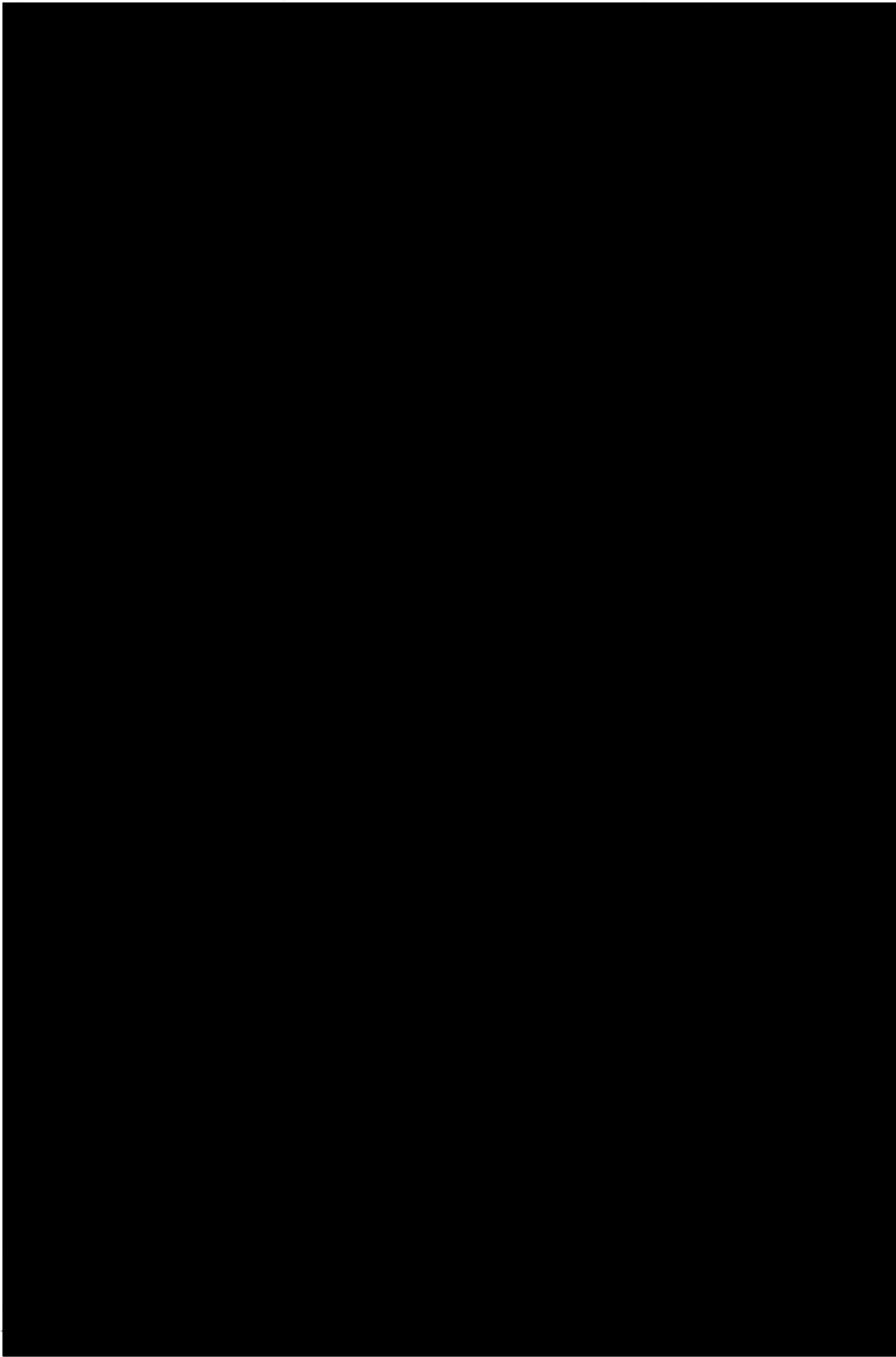
Links to media coverage thus far on the launch of KidsPace:

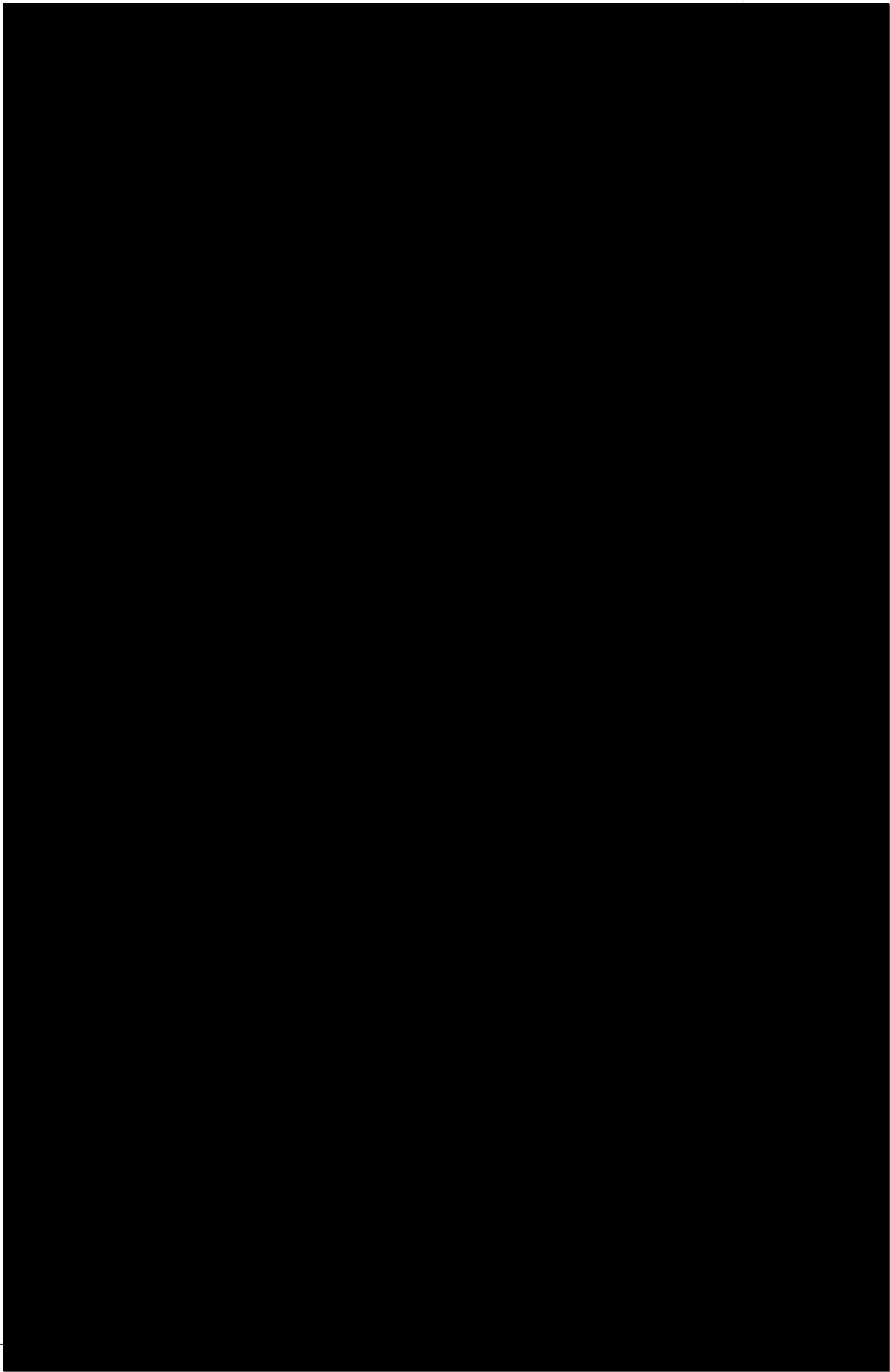
- **ABC News:** <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-02/work-to-be-done-to-ensure-safety-of-children-dance-schools/7213554>
- **ABC Radio National:** <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2016/s4416872.htm>
- **Mamamia:** <http://www.mamamia.com.au/dance-industry-royal-commission/>

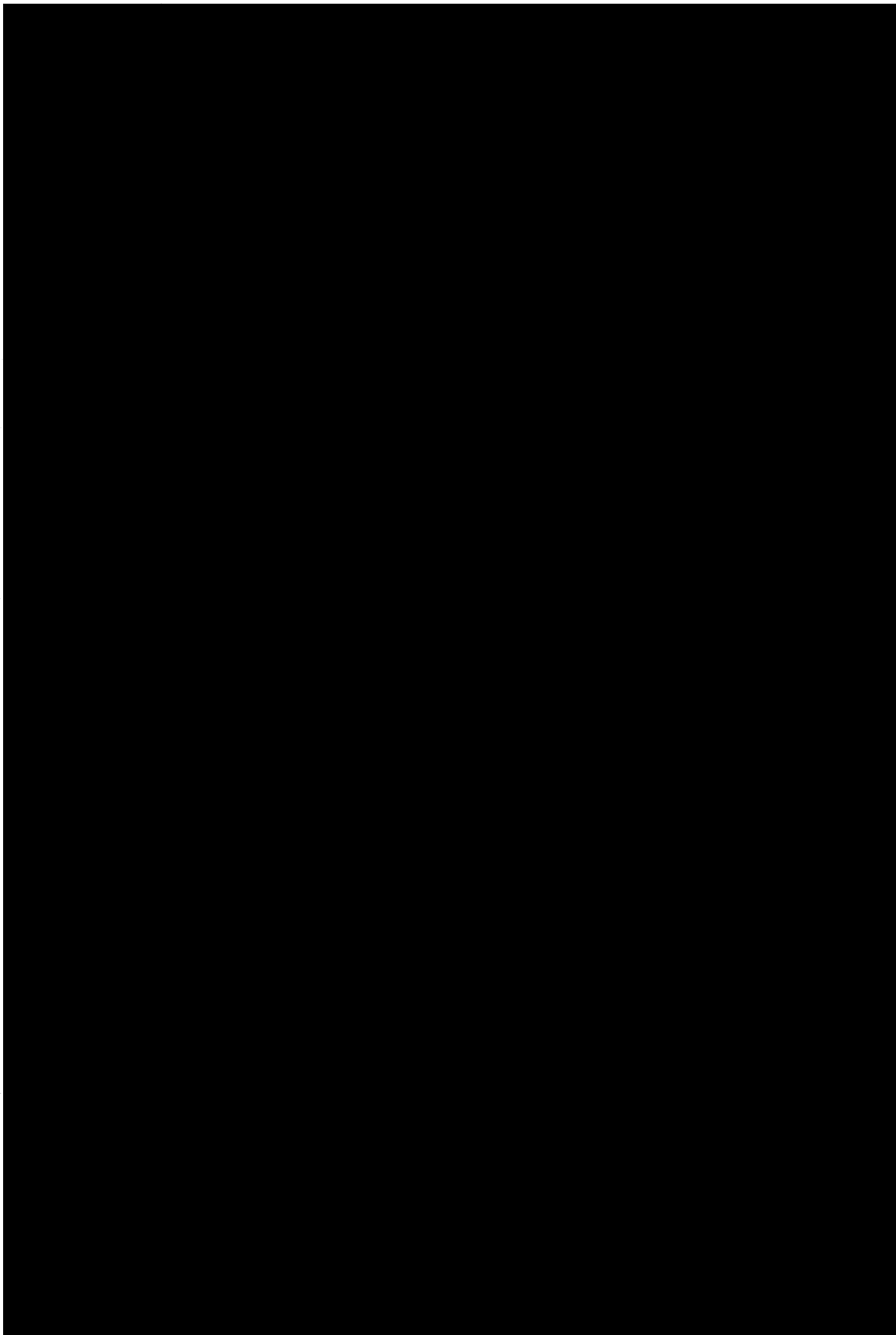
Following the *KidsPace Dance Code of Practice* is Appendices 1-3 as referred to in the Terms of Reference of this document. I would like to thank the Inquiry for taking the time to read and consider this submission. I also express my sincere interest in discussing this submission further in person, at your request.

Yours Sincerely,
Jemma Nicoll









Appendices 1

The sexification of young dancers: Inside Australia's booming dance studio scene

By *Jemma Nicoll*

Eyes shining with delight, Nia twirls and twirls as shimmering pink feathers soar in the wind swelled by her rapid movement. Encased in the fluorescent cage of a burlesque feather fan, she is mesmerised by her imitation of a Las Vegas Showgirl. Adorned in silver glitter-speckled shorts and a nude sports bra, Nia's outfit for her upcoming dance competition fulfills its designer's intention of creating that stark, naked illusion.

"I'm hot! I'm mean! You can't have me! You can't afford me!" screams her choreographer as Nia endeavours to channel the sensual character; coordinating the fan and challenging dance routine of high kicks, hip grinds and eye winks. She is training to win gold, alongside her troupe of six other mock-topless, feathered friends.

"This costume's better than all of the other costumes because it makes my body look pretty... it makes me look beautiful," Nia says.

Nia is eight-years-old.

"It is as if contemporary girls are in a great hurry to grow up," says Marika Tiggemann in her latest study, 'Contemporary Girlhood: Maternal Reports on Sexualised Behaviour and Appearance in 4-10 year-old girls', released June last year. Tiggemann and fellow researcher, Amy Slater, from Flinders University in Adelaide, are the first to document the appearance-obsessed behaviours of young Australian girls. Results show that an epidemic of girls aged four to 10-years-old are prematurely engaging with teen culture, and exhibiting hyper-sexualised behaviours through attention to personal grooming, clothing and bodily appearance.



Are our Generation Z girls too sexy too soon? (freeimages.com)

The study of almost 1000 girls has forecast a bleak outcome for Nia's generation, whose earlier burlesque display was seen by millions on *Dance Moms*: the show tracking the pre-pubescent stars of Abby Lee Miller's Pittsburgh USA dance studio. The show is a growing place of worship for thousands of aspiring Australian dancers, and the wallet swallowing the income of their parents who recently paid hundreds for their daughters to attend classes with Abby Lee, on March 13 at Bankstown Sports Club. Despite being known for its overtly sexual content and verbally abusive teaching tactics, *Dance Moms* fever has infected the country.

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“As a society, we have yet to see the consequences of an entire new generation of girls brought up in a highly sexualized environment.” said Tiggemann.

“If the focus on appearance...becomes their habitual way of viewing themselves, then this is liable to have negative consequences for their well-being as a teenager and as an adult woman.”

According to Tiggemann’s results, by the age of eight, 28 percent of Australian girls are dissatisfied with their physical appearance, 76 percent are particularly fussy about what they wear and are frequently asking: “does this look good on me?” and 13 percent are exiting the house with a made-up face.

And out of all the things little girls love to do, there is one common denominator that surpassed all activities listed in the study: 96 percent love to dance.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports that at April 2012 there were 727,000 girls aged five to 14 years participating in an organised sport outside of school. Of this figure, 418,100 were enrolled in a dance school (58 percent), up from 390,400 in 2009. The rate of Australian girls participating in dance lessons is rising by annual increments of tens of thousands; it is certainly happy days for current and prospective studio directors.

The Lolita Effect

“Come on we’ve got these good bodies now, and they’re not going to last forever so let’s show it while we’ve got it. Come on, put it out there girls, you’ve got it. Now flaunt it!”

Deborah Watson, primary school teacher and Learning Support consultant, animatedly re-enacts an overheard dance teacher working with the school’s lunchtime dance groups.

“How old were the dancers? Eight, nine, 10 years old,” she says. “Then there were four girls in this particular school who had more solid builds...they pulled out because their parents said they don’t feel comfortable in those costumes, but the teacher wouldn’t make allowances to alter the costumes for them. I spoke to a mother whose daughter is self-harming too, since quitting dance group from being teased.”

“You fit the costume or you’re out, is the idea.” she says.

Watson is a serial ‘mystery shopper’ of Sydney dance studios. The mother of two daughters, aged nine and 15, has spent the last 12 years embarking on a series of ‘free trial classes.’

“I heard a parent once ask why the kids did so much abdominal work at the beginning of the class, and the teacher’s response was ‘because we’ve all got midribs for our costumes this year, and the girls need to have flat abs’.” She vividly describes the hot pink, sequined equivalent of a string bikini, with fishnet stockings and black jazz shoes.

Social researchers call it the ‘Lolita Effect’; a term to describe the imposition of sexualisation through mass media messages, on young girls whom are yet to reach the required development. Watson is convinced that local organisations are flying under the radar in fuelling the Lolita Effect.

“In this other school, nine and 10 years old girls were heavily made up. What struck me was the eyeliner, this is what they chose to wear to class to fit into the group dynamic,” she said.

“The girls had crop tops and tiny shorts. There were only two girls that had a full leotard and they were very much over here on this side,” Deborah gestures left, “and those in the crop tops were over here. It was very clear who was in and who was out.”

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The Eisteddfod Battleground

Dance eisteddfods, hundreds of them, are dotted around the country. They are a magnet for studios to gather, compete and showcase the works of their students.

Sydney adjudicator, performer and high school teacher Melissa Lukins, is disappointed by what she has critiqued at eisteddfod events: "I've observed as an adjudicator the unusually sexual nature of young dancers' facial expressions, their movements, costumes and general attitude towards dance performance."

Lukins lists countless influencing factors.

"'Dance Moms' has seemed to propagate this.... as students see other dance schools presenting this type of choreography they pressure their teachers to fit in with the culture. It is alarming," said Ms Lukins.

At the Front Line

It all became too much for Dodie Wilson, another NSW adjudicator and retired studio director, who is actively opposing the culture she has witnessed in her 25 years of work in Australian eisteddfods.



Dance eisteddfods are a second home. Pic: Jemma Nicoll

"Once it's on stage, it's seen. It's out there. You can't take it back. The minute that child gets on stage in an inappropriate costume... too late, everybody's seen it," Wilson says.

"The minute they're flashing their private areas, it's done. In front of brothers, uncles. And that child... that eight, nine, 10, 12 year old child has been, in a way, violated. They have done what they were told to do."

Wilson is paving the way in the local eisteddfod scene by hosting a 'child safety' competition event that is the first of its kind. With the glitz and the glam, come guidelines.

"They must wear stockings at all times...two-piece costume items must be seven centimetres from the bust, and I have actually banned particular movements," she said.

The syllabus outline distributed to participants spells out the consequences of entering the event, launched in Seven Hills Sydney last October. Immediate disqualification applies to dancers where costumes do not cover seven centimetres of midriff, where lyrics contain sexual content, and if choreography includes the banned movements.

"Any music or movements that seem to be breaking the rules or are inappropriate, a bell will ring, the music will start to fade and we will motion the child on stage to curtsy...the routine will be stopped."

Perhaps teachers should submit their music and costume selections prior to the event, to minimise the risk of humiliating a child onstage.

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Wilson says she has had an overwhelming amount of positive support through private messages over social media, however she is disappointed that little public support has been offered to counteract the backlash received from online groups.

“Teachers are scared. They are scared to be part of the change, for whatever reason in case five years down the track it changes back again or it just doesn’t work,” she says.

“Will you lose students? Maybe. But then you’ll know you’re doing the right thing.”

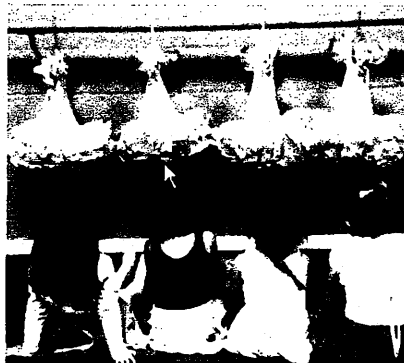


Image Source: Jemma Nicoll

Amongst other influences, Wilson attributes the hyper-sexualised studio culture craze to RG Dance, infamous for its former director now facing child sex offence charges. She describes their competition troupes as mechanical in precision with faultless technique, miniscule outfits and adult-themed concepts. They won gold each time.

“Teacher’s saw this, they believed they had the secret. So they copied.”

How will the sexual messages shouldered by young dancers today potentially affect adulthood?

“I believe they will be so brokenhearted, that they will have nothing to do with the dance industry when they’re older,” she said.

Dance, Sex and Science

According to medical doctor turned sexologist and writer, Patricia Weerakoon, the increase of girls engaging in dance communities, determines the need to assess studio culture in line with documented hyper-sexualised behaviours.

“Everything that goes into the brain, especially during that rapid development of childhood, will influence the brain’s wiring. As the child grows, and the more sexualised their culture [is], the more the brain will recognise at building those sexual circuits. It will recognise it as something that is normal or good.”

The University of Sydney’s Honorary Senior Lecturer in Health Sciences has spent 40 years as a medical practitioner, sexual health educator and sex therapist. Dr Weerakoon’s concern for what she calls ‘raunch culture’ stems from years of research into childhood brain development.

“It’s called Neuroplasticity,” said Dr Weerakoon.

“From the time the baby is developing in the womb... the brain adapts based on what is going on. In a child’s brain, everything from birth through to teen and young adulthood, that time of quick and rapid growth is a time where [there] is a huge amount of brain wiring and rewiring.”

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“And what we know is that [the brain] is influenced by social environment, the environment that the child is in. Everything that goes into the brain changes the wiring,” she said.

Dr Weerakoon holds grave concerns for the wellbeing of the post-millennial generation, whom she believes will be the most sexualised people to walk the planet.

“They see themselves in a way that empowerment, being powerful, being popular, means you have to make yourself sexual. [Because of cultural pressures], girls are making themselves sex objects, and are willing to give sex, be sexy, dress sexual,” she said.

“If you are running a dance studio, you have a great responsibility because the music you play and what you are teaching, everything you say is working into their brain.”

Dr Weerakoon urges parents to speak up: “Parents must be parents; parents must say no, parents must say: ‘for my child, this is not right’. You have to be proactive... because I guarantee when you stop one avenue of sexualisation others will spring up... But be proactive to do something about protecting kids,” she said.

“And teachers need to do the protecting from their end too.”

Call for tighter regulation

For dance teacher of 18 years and mother of four, Elizabeth Wever, her experiences within the industry demonstrates an urgent need for improved teacher training.

Wever was subjected to strict dieting and exercise regimes from a young teenager, an endeavour of her dance teacher to assist in achieving the ‘correct size’ of a dancer.

“I yoyo dieted and struggled emotionally with weight issues as a result until my twenties... when I quit dancing as a result of being told too many times I was not the right body shape for a dancer.”

Mental and emotional recovery was a long and arduous road.

“I am long past caring about the judgment of others about my body shape... however it breaks my heart to think that other young girls are being subjected to this type of scrutiny,” she said.

Wever and Watson are concerned that dance teachers are not undergoing thorough training or regulation procedures.

“There is not enough regulation in the dance industry,” says Watson.

“If we can regulate the fitness industry... if we can regulate after-school care... you can’t even work in vacation care unless you have a certificate. But you can go out and open a dance school and teach dancing to all with no qualifications.”

“How many dance schools out there have a Working with Children check? Do parents even look at that?” asks Watson.

A number of tertiary institutions across Australia offer Dance Education certificates and degrees, a compulsory qualification for those seeking employment in the public school sector. However this is not mandatory for studio ownership. There are no required certificates or standardised procedures.

The national peak body for Australian dance information is Ausdance. Despite the range of online resources available to encourage the aspiring teacher, on the Question and Answer page of their website, it states:

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“Q: Do dance studio teachers have to obtain a dance teaching qualification?”

A: No.”

Mental Health in the Studio

In May 2014, The Frontiers in Psychology Journal published that anxiety and depression accounted for the highest disease amongst Australian children today. Aside from external stresses of divorce, grief, and life transitions, experts rank internal factors such as irrational belief systems and pessimistic tendencies as high risk factors for mental health issues.

So do dance teachers hold any responsibility for engaging with mental health matters, and the internal consequences of teaching practices?

“Of course,” says Jane Cuneen, Principal of Caringbah North Public School, a large primary school in Southern Sydney. Cuneen is also the mother of an aspiring young dancer.

“All adults who have the privilege of teaching young minds have the responsibility to develop the child socially, emotionally and spiritually as well as physically, regardless of their specialty.”

Cuneen is saddened by comments of dance teachers regarding bodily expectations and the need to be ‘sexy’.

“Is it that these teachers don’t have the training that says comments like these are detrimental and have long lasting emotional and psychological effects on our girls?”

“Most parents don’t even know that these comments are being directed at their daughters. Because most dance classes are closed doors, we don’t know how our kids are being treated.”

Watson agrees.

“When those core beliefs have been set up, those things that your parents said was ok and that your dance school said was ok.... well to challenge them is a very hard thing. What happens when those core beliefs let you down?”

“In 10 years time we’ll be picking up pieces of these girls that are damaged.

But it can be avoided.”

#tilttuesday: are girls at risk of being preyed on?

There are 172,311 posts currently under the #tilttuesday hashtag feed. Then there are 3,434 under #tilttuesdays for those who prefer plurality and 324 for #tilttuesday for those rejecting mainstream spelling. The list continues of the variations of categories young dancers enter in Instagram when posting their ‘tilt’ photographs (on Tuesday).

A ‘tilt’ is when a dancer extends their leg up to 180 degrees away, and tilts their torso slightly to one side, or ‘off-centre’, so the leg reaches maximum height and split. It can be elegant when executed correctly, an impressive display of flexibility and strength. However should the dancer not yet possess the level of strength to execute the ‘tilt’, they grab hold of their ankle with both hands and push the pelvis forward in order to take the stress off the hamstrings.

This can produce a distorted display of exposed body parts, as girls as young as eight capture, caption, hashtag and post for the worldwide, weekly phenomenon of #tilttuesday. This has become the most popular online fad for young dancers who seek the connection and approval of fellow artists around the globe.

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Conversations overhead as a studio director suggest division among dance teachers over the craze, many encouraging their students to participate and even do so themselves. It's ok; they're stretching and having fun, they're not intentionally posting in an overtly sexual way. I disagree.

Open your Instagram application. Click 'explore', type in 'tilttuesday' and start your own search. Among the thousands of young girls, many in sports bra and booty short attire in dance studios, on front lawns or in bedrooms, you may stumble across the image that caught my eye in particular: a girl of around age 16, striking the position in white translucent boyleg underwear; the shadows of her pubic hair and the physical outlines of genitalia clearly visible.

Continue scrolling; aside from the "You're not doing it properly", "Your tilt is normally better than this" and comments targeting thigh wobbles, belly rolls, breasts, lack of visible abdominal lines and attacks on dancers' bodies and skill, you will see comments like this:

"Love to f**k you in that position." This Instagram handle has posted zero photos and maintains a steady stream of two followers; we can only assume his online activity is simply to peruse and predate.

"Need f**k."

"#wouldhit."

"Do you ever dance naked?" This user is a Chelsea Football Club fanatic who regularly posts photos of beautiful young girls.

"Are those stripper bruises on your thighs?"

"Close your legs, it stink."

"I'm single, that's all I got to say."

"Wats poppin tonite??"

"DM me." Or 'private message me'; repeatedly from the same user on multiple photos on the #tilttuesday feed.

This is, in my view, a pedophile's playground.

Dancers innocently upload images, eyes are drawn to their private areas and men unashamedly publicise their approval. They express their desire to sexually act on the posed dancer, a minor, a child. They are open about their enjoyment of the image.

Comments are not deleted nor images removed. Instagram provides zero privacy settings.

No blame is to be cast on these dancers. A 10-year-old girl has not yet mastered the ability to assess the consequences of an image. She is simply playing copycat with her peers, her dance teachers, and succumbing to the pressure of what needs to be performed in order to gain the acceptance that Instagram 'likes' provide.

There are 172,311 #tilttuesday images worldwide subject to the scrutiny of perusing eyes. If you check back next Tuesday and see for yourself, that figure will no doubt have risen. It is not until she is well into adulthood after potentially wrestling with body image, mental health issues and more, that she may look back and regret the online broadcasting and exposure of her fragile, precious little body in such a way. She may one day ask her teachers, parents and guides, 'why didn't you say something?'

Appendices 2

'Pop That': how the dance industry caters for paedophilic fantasies with underage girls

By Jemma Nicoll



The girl on your left is 16.

The one in the middle is 14.

The one to your right, she's 12 years old.

And the dancewear company they model for think it's OK to exploit them for male paedophilic fantasies. 'Pop that'. For those who are unaware, this is a porn-inspired phrase referring to the 'popping' of her cherry – taking her virginity. It's a popular porn genre.

It is also the phrase superimposed over the three child models on the homepage of California Kisses (CK); a popular American dance wear label currently advertising for new Australian stockists. The dancers featured are posed coyly in CK's renowned crop and booty short combinations.

In a recent advertisement for the label, CK feature a girl who appears to be around 5-7 years of age dressed in a brief French Maid's outfit.



The brand currently supply to four Australian stockists including Showcase: the largest dance competition event in the country. Together, Showcase and CK held the 'California Kisses Australian Model Search' in January, with the crowned winner receiving an all-expenses paid trip to the U.S for a modeling shoot with the company.

The parent company of Showcase is Global Events & Entertainment Pty Ltd, which holds the exclusive license to on-sell CK stock in Australia. Last week they invited all Australian dancewear retailers to submit an application to stock the CK label.



Showcase Australian Dance Championships Our Parent Company" Global Events & Entertainment Pty Ltd" is excited to now be offering an exclusive opportunity to select retail and on line dance-wear stores here in Australia to stock & sell "California Kisses" all year round. Your business must be well established in the market and have a strong customer base. Dance wear stores must show a good store fit out by sending photos that reflects to the high quality of the California Kisses brand to be sold within the r store. California Kisses can now only be purchased by an Australian Distributor to the Australian Market. Applications can apply and send expressions of interested and details of their current operations to sales@globalevents.tv (applications close this Friday April 24th)

Like Reply 2

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CK has a global following of over 278,000 users on Instagram. On reading the comments that flood their account daily, their audience can be compartmentalised into two: dancers as young as 10, and older men who blatantly express their gratification at the little girls posing in the CK range. Here is a sample of what the company allow on their page for thousands of girls to see.

'Give me a blowy'

*'F*** her right in the pussy'*

*'Nice body for f***'*

*'Nice position for f***'*

'Slap it'

'I enjoy this photo'

'Mmmh'

'Small as breasticles'

'[Too] flat chested. What's the reason to wear that if there's nothing?'

*'This b**** is anorexic'*

'So hot'

'Sexy girl',

'So cute girl',

'I want to marry her',

'Hey how old are you?'

After clicking on a serial commenter who appreciates many of the company's images, I arrived at the profile of a middle-aged man smiling proudly alongside his wife and two sons.

After pasting one of many foreign comments by Middle-Eastern men into Google translator, I can now say 'absolutely gorgeous' in the Farsi dialect.

Among the pedophilic comments are those of thousands of young girls despising their own bodies and publicly shaming the faces, bellies, breasts and thighs of others. 'I'm so fat I don't stand a chance' says one, with crying face emoticon and a gun pointing towards it.

With advertising and online practices like these, we call on Australian dancewear companies to demonstrate corporate social responsibility and not go near the CK brand. Current Australian stockists should remove the CK brand.

California Kisses needs to clean up its act and do right by the thousands of young girls that follow their every move.

*Appendices 3***Pole dancing for girls: how a sex industry practice puts them at risk**

'We are enrolling them into a billion-dollar global industry that objectifies, oppresses and conditions women to believe they are created for sex'

By Jemma Nicoll

The studio is dim. Neon lights flash around the room in a club-esque fashion. A swarm of what appears to be 6-year-old girls climb, twist and twirl around the floor-to-ceiling iconic poles that will be used for much more than monkey's business once it's past their bedtime. Dance attire for sale at this Bendigo, Victoria, pole dance studio include booty shorts with 'Firty' plastered across the bottom.

"We didn't want to get it mixed up with the concept of adult pole dancing," says Saari Frochot-Ryan, owner and manager of Z Fit Studios, which hosts the 'Monkey Kids' pole program for children aged 3-11.

"The classes are completely child appropriate," says Frochot-Ryan.

Z Fit Studios also offer 'Teen Pole' lessons, as well as a range of 'naughty', 'sexy' and 'provocative' adult classes. On the company's website, this ad appears below the 'Monkey Kids' information:



#AussieTWERKtour

According to *The Project*, in an episode last month, pole dancing is the booming new exercise fad for Australian children. Promoted as innocent child's play, instructors promise a fun fitness experience with significant health benefits.

Welcome to the 21st Century: where we create a child-friendly replica of the most prevalent symbol of the adult entertainment industry and label it 'fun'.

This is pornified culture disguised as a shiny after-school sport. It may be pole dancing training wheels now with upbeat music, neon colours, kindergarten giggles and games; but in a few years a riskier game begins.

Pole dancing has a long-standing association with the sex industry. It was hailed an icon in the burlesque scene throughout the 1950s, and by the 1960s was established worldwide in gentlemen's clubs, strip joints and red light districts. Pole companies argue that its origins trace further back to the traditional Indian sport 'Mallakhamb': a strength training method executed on a vertical wooden pole.

What they fail to mention however, is that the sport was developed for male wrestlers and women were banned from participation. The sport was deemed culturally inappropriate for women due to the pole's symbolism: a *phallus*, or spiritual representation of the male genitalia.

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The pole permeates time and culture with the sinister notion that women are decorative objects to be twirled, twisted and tangled around; a global denotation of the way we reduce women to mere titillating instruments. The pole teases out the approval, gratification and sexual advances of a male audience who pay for this 'entertainment' around the globe; the exchange of cash for voyeuristic pleasure.

This history is now prettily packaged as a fun fitness opportunity for your child to achieve optimum strength, flexibility and coordination. Let's take a look at what will be available for your daughter in a few short years.

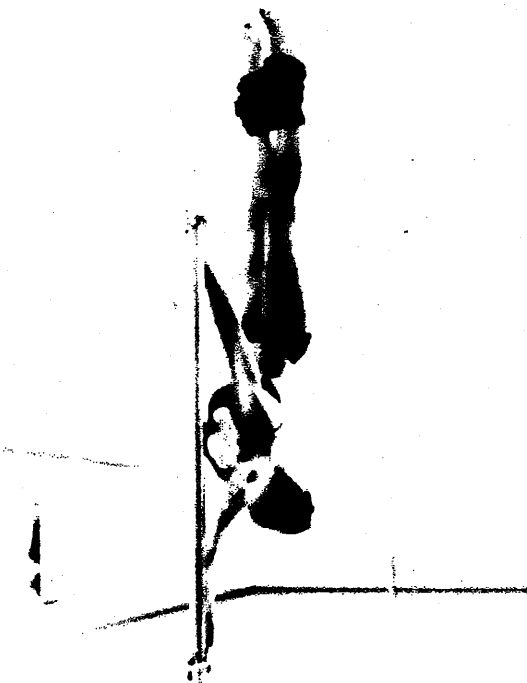
At *Pole Princess* in Victoria, there are six class options available for teenage girls. They must have the written consent of parents to attend, and fathers are not permitted inside the studio. Aside from the 'Sexy Legs' and 'Princess Workout' classes, there is the 'Booti-Funk' option that, as stated on their site engages "sexy exotic movement."

Or your daughter could enrol in the 'Burlesque' lesson, which uses traditional burlesque choreography combined with "the sexy dancers of today, like the Pussy Cat Dolls."

At *Poleates* in Blacktown NSW, girls as young as 15 are invited to participate as 'pole virgins' in the 'Virgin' class for beginner dancers.

Desert Pole Fit state in their 'Pole Fit for Kids' advertisement that "in order to become a professional pole dancer, it is never too early to start." Directly below this, a video plays of a dancer on her knees, seductively removing her skirt to reveal an underwear and stiletto combination, before launching onto the pole.

And over in Sydney's north, teenage girls aged 13-16 can attend classes at *Pol-arise*. According to their website, girls will find themselves "developing washboard abs, tight toosh and a long, lean, sexy physique", whilst simultaneously resolving "self-confidence and body confidence issues." This is the image the company uses for self-promotion:



Source: www.pol-arise.com.au

In contrast to the claims made by *Pol-arise*, the pressure to achieve a 'sexy physique' holds no resolution for body image issues. Sexualisation is a proven, direct causal link to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders and the rapid decline in girls' psychological health.

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The American Psychological Association's Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls found that self-esteem and depression in girls is inextricably linked to the exposure of the sexualised female ideal, and the pressure to achieve this.

Kids pole programs are an embodiment of the way culture distorts girlhood to fit an adultified mould. As Linda Papadopoulos writes in her review commissioned by the UK Home Office, The Sexualisation of Young People, we are "legitimising the notion that children can be related to as sexual objects" through engaging children with hyper-sexualised behaviours.

"We are raising a generation of girls aspiring to careers requiring a 'sexy' image"

We are raising a generation of girls aspiring to careers requiring a 'sexy' image. A UK online survey asked 1,000 teenage girls their dream profession. Out of the available choices including teaching and medicine, 63% selected 'glamour modelling' and a quarter of girls placed 'lap dancing' as a preferred choice.

The aspirational connotations associated with sex trade and pornographic practices, according to Papadopoulos, are reflective of our pornified culture.

This deeply ingrained cultural mindset has led us to believe that girls' engagement in pole dancing is a harmless practice. I disagree.

Search 'pole dance kids', and the fifth result is of a primary school-aged child imitating mainstream pole movement to a sultry soundtrack in her home: complete with hair flicks, back arches, knee spreads and a delighted online troll who says: 'She'd look even better wrapped around my pole.'

Search 'pole dance teens' and the inappropriate content warnings issued by YouTube are indicative of what kids pole programs are setting little girls up for: grinding, twerking, thrusting, leg spreads, body rolls, sliding and crawling along the floor in padded bras, g-strings, lingerie and 'naughty school girl' costumes. And this is all before turning 18, where girls may then transition into adult lessons around the country ranging from beginner, to advanced 'strip and lap' classes.

Encouraging our girls to partake in a key income-generator of the sex industry is a mistake.

We are enrolling them into a billion-dollar global industry that objectifies, oppresses and conditions women to believe they are created for sex. We are enrolling them into an economic and cultural landscape that proliferates the commodification of the bodies of women and girls; a culture that screams body before brains.

Let girls run, kick a ball, surf, dance, hike, indoor rock climb, balance the beam at their local gymnastics club. There are many fitness avenues that are not founded on the premise of gratifying male sexual demand.