

Bravehearts Position Statement



Posting Images on Social Networking Sites: Trends and risks

One of the major recent trends on social networking sites, such as Twitter, Tumblr and Facebook, has been young people uploading ‘selfies’ – photographs taken of themselves, by themselves.

The trend more often than not sees young women posing seductively, pouting at the camera or dressed in swimwear or lingerie. Embraced by celebrities, from Kim Kardashian to Demi Moore to Stephanie Rice, selfies can be seen as purely an outlet for self-expression, but they may also be seen as exploitative images, specifically with young people readily emulating the behaviours of their role models.

Recently Bendon came under fire for promoting a “Lovable Besties Campaign” on Facebook which encouraged young women to post selfies of themselves and their best friend. While the company stated that they did not intend to suggest the photographs should be of women in lingerie, the photographs accompanying the campaign were of two women posing in their underwear.

Whether intentional or not, the industry spends billions of dollars on marketing and advertising each year, shaping and reinforcing social trends with little thought of the consequences of campaigns on children and young people. We are increasingly becoming aware of the dangers of an increasingly sexualised society on young people.

In a 2011 study looking at online activities of Australian children and young people, posting photos (and videos etc) was one of the most popular activities with young people (although the study did not specifically look at whether the images were of themselves or other photos):

- 35% of 9-12 year old girls and 18% of 9-12 year old boys sharing images etc
- 72% of 13-16 year old girls and 57% of 13-16 year old boys sharing images etc.

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse warns that there are two major issues that young people need to be aware of when posting images.

- Images posted by young people may unknowingly be considered pornographic or sexually exploitive and may be illegal. Such images may be used inappropriately by others.
- Images may be used in cyber bullying behaviour to “intentionally harm, harass or perpetrate hostility”.

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The trend of young people posting images that may be considered provocative continues to concern Bravehearts. We strongly advocate for both greater education and awareness for young people around safe internet use and for industry to promote corporate responsibility in advertising and marketing.

References:

- Green, L., Brady, D., Ólafsson, K., Hartley, J., & Lumby, C. (2011). *Risks and Safety for Australian Children on the Internet*. ARC Centre for Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, Edith Cowan University
- National Child Protection Clearinghouse (2010). *Images of Children and Young People Online*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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