

## Pin-ups in public space Sexist outdoor advertising as sexual harassment

Lauren Rosewarne

*Department of Political Science, University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010, Australia*

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### Synopsis

In Australia, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission specifically lists the display of pin-ups as an example of sexually harassing behaviour. While sexual harassment legislation in both Australia and the United States covers sites including workplaces and educational institutions, such legislation has not been designed to include sexual harassment occurring in public space. This article will explore the reality that outdoor advertisements on public display are visually very similar to sexually harassing pin-ups, as will be demonstrated through references to examples collected as part of a year long study of outdoor advertising in Melbourne, Australia. Because of the visual similarities between outdoor advertising and, for example, pin-ups which are prohibited in sites such as workplaces, this article suggests that both media should be critiqued in the exact same manner. This article argues that the specific elements that make sexual harassment inappropriate in the workplace – i.e., the captive environment that is created whereby exposure to sexual images is unavoidable – is a situation replicated in public space with a person utilising space being held captive in a similar manner. Similarly, this article will explore the manner in which pin-ups masculinise a workplace in the same way that sexist outdoor advertisements masculinise public space. The usefulness, limitations and feasibility of the application of sexual harassment discussions to sexist outdoor advertisements will also be considered. Crown Copyright © 2007 Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

This article focuses on sexist representations of women in outdoor advertising, exploring how visually similar many outdoor advertisements are to pin-ups. In Australia, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) includes pin-ups in their description of behaviour that is sexually harassing:

“uninvited touching; uninvited kisses or embraces; smutty jokes or comments; making promises or threats in return for sexual favours; displays of sexually graphic material including posters, pin-ups, cartoons, graffiti or messages left on notice boards, desks or common areas; repeated invitations to go out after prior refusal” (HREOC, 1994).

The fact that images bearing strong resemblance to pin-ups are permitted to be displayed outdoors in public space where the audience cannot avoid their exposure, reflects an interesting policy double standard that will be the focus of this article.

Sex in advertising is by no means a new phenomenon; advertising theorist, Tom Reichert, dates the earliest sexual advertising images back to 1850 (Reichert, 2003). As advertiser, Bob Garfield explains, “[t]here is scarcely a category in all of advertising... that hasn't invoked sexual imagery, sexual situations, or just basic sex appeal” (Garfield, 2003, p. 63). Of course, the issue of sex in advertising is not a gender neutral one, as Reichert notes in his volume *The Erotic History of Advertising*; while he claims his book is “not meant to be a volume on women's portrayal in the media”, he

acknowledges that “[s]ince perhaps 90 percent of sexual content in advertising involves women, this history does provide information on women’s portrayal in the media” (Reichert, 2003, p. 11). Reichert’s comments remind us that sex in advertising is too often a euphemism for *women* in advertising, largely because the bulk of content incorporates images of women. Despite feminist concerns about the use of women in advertising fervent since the 1960s (Friedan, 1963), one need only look at billboards on any given thoroughfare to ascertain that very little headway has been made to prevent sexist advertising. This article therefore, asserts that new ways of thinking about it need to be devised. The focus of this article is outdoor advertising, and the new lens that will be presented for examining sexist outdoor portrayals is that they constitute public sexual harassment. In the workplace for example, pin-ups are deemed problematic because employees are held “captive” to them in that their exposure is made unavoidable. This exact same situation is played out in the outdoors: A commuter cannot avoid seeing a sexist billboard. Sexual harassment will also be used as a way to understand sexist outdoor advertising because of the parallels that can be drawn between the ways that both media masculinise space. The usefulness, limitations and feasibility of the application of a sexual harassment framework to outdoor advertising will also be considered. Sexual harassment has been chosen as a lens for this article over other legislative frameworks, such as vilification laws, primarily because of the unique captive audience issues raised in sexual harassment situations and with outdoor advertising. It should however, also be noted that sexual harassment has been chosen as a framework over vilification in this article because although expanding vilification laws to include vilification caused by sexist advertising has been previously suggested (Office of Women’s Policy, 2002), such laws are not currently used to protect women, rather are focussed on protecting the rights of religious and racial groups and therefore such terminology does not seem as appropriate to the very women-centred problem of sexist advertising.

### Understanding pin-ups as sexual harassment

One of the earliest examples of pin-ups being discussed legally was in the 1986 U.K. case *Strathclyde Regional Council v. Porcelli*. In this case, Mrs Porcelli, a laboratory technician, alleged sexual harassment against co-workers, including her comparison ‘to nude pinups in the newspaper’ (Isle of Man website, 2003, p. 8). In the 1990 U.S. case *Tunis v. Corning Glass Works*, pin-ups, catcalls and wolf-whistles were

similarly mentioned by the sexual harassment complainants. Both cases were dismissed but exist as early examples of sexist material being discussed as potentially sexually harassing in a legal context. In the landmark 1991 U.S. sexual harassment case *Robinson v. Jacksonville Shipyards*, judgment went to the plaintiff and the court made what the groundbreaking ruling that the display of pictures of naked and scantily clad women qualified as sexual harassment under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Tifft, 1991). In essence the judge in this case devised one of the earliest examples of what Dana S. Connell terms ‘a comprehensive sexual harassment policy’ (Connell, 1991, p. 191). This case was the first U.S. federal district court ruling that named pin-ups as sexual harassment and became instrumental in the definition of ‘sexual harassment’ being broadened beyond speech to include pictures and photographs (Schauer, 2004). Since *Robinson*, pin-ups have been mentioned in numerous other American sexual harassment cases, notably in the 1999 case *EEOC v. Ford Motor Company* (Chicago), where 600 women complained about a workplace permeated with offensive references to women which included “pin-up calendars” and were ultimately awarded \$8m (EEOC Determination Supports Charges of Sexual Harassment At Two Ford Motor Company Plants in Chicago, 1999, n.p.). In Australia as early as 1990, the display of pin-ups in the workplace was identified as a burgeoning legal concern for organisations, notably for BHP steelworks, where the display of such materials led to one of the earliest examples of an Australian workplace sexual harassment policy (McLean, 1990). HREOC in Australia specifically mentions the display of pin-ups amongst their list of sexually harassing behaviours. In a speech given by the then Acting Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Moira Scollay, the justification for their inclusion is quite simple:

“Male working culture may promote the sexualisation and objectification of women even though they are their fellow workers. The use of pin-ups in male work sites and sexual banter and jokes are good examples of this. Their use can be viewed as signs of group solidarity.” (Scollay, 1997, n.p.).

This article deems the display of sexist outdoor advertising to be a public policy issue in the same way that pin-ups in the workplace are understood to be. As will be detailed, both pin-ups and outdoor advertisements are visually similar; in both a workplace and a public space setting audiences are held captive to such images; and both sets of images work to masculinise space in a way that makes women feel excluded. This

article suggests that given the public familiarity with the term as well as legislation existing around sexual harassment, such understandings should come to include highly sexualised outdoor advertising. It should however, be noted that the major shortcoming in using this framework is that while it provides a new lens for examining the issue, doing so in an academic sense is substantially different to expecting legislation to follow suit. According to Australia's Sex Discrimination Act, a person or organisation is liable for their own acts of sexual harassment, any act of victimisation or for causing, instructing, inducing, aiding or permitting sexual harassment to occur. This definition explains that for somebody to be held liable for involvement with sexual harassment according to the legislation, the person(s) responsible need to be easily identifiable. In the outdoor advertising situation, the case of identifying who is liable is not so simple. In a workplace, the employer or organisation is held liable for allowing sexual harassment to occur. In outdoor advertising, many bodies and individuals could be held liable. The 2000 Windsor Smith case in Australia illustrates this quandary well. In 2000, shoe-manufacturer Windsor Smith ran an outdoor advertising campaign which depicted a woman kneeling in front of a man, the man's hand drawing her head towards his crotch. Australia's advertising self-regulator, the Advertising Standards Board (ASB) upheld public complaints about this billboard, thus illustrating the mainstream condemnation of this advertisement. Windsor Smith as the actual advertised brand seems the most obvious candidate for liability. Lisa Trendell, the woman who actually designed the campaign at the corporation's request is obviously also potentially liable. Advertising agencies are often hired by companies to create marketing campaigns, thus perhaps liability is also situated there.

Australian Posters was the company that rented the billboard spaces to the agency which designed the advertisement. They may also be deemed liable. Another candidate for liability is the ASB as the industry self-regulator. While the ASB did uphold complaints about this advertisement, there is much scope for criticism regarding their involvement. The ASB does not engage in pre-vetting of outdoor advertising material before it is displayed. This is different to, for example, television where all commercials in Australia are pre-vetted by the Commercials Acceptance Division of FreeTV Australia (FreeTV Australia, 2004). It may be interpreted therefore, that the ASB was responsible for the sexually harassing Windsor Smith billboard being displayed. Unlike

regulators in other countries such as France and the United Kingdom (Boddewyn, 1988) or Belgium, Italy, Denmark, Germany, Greece and Ireland (Advertising Education Forum, 2005, n.p.), the ASB is not involved in ongoing media monitoring either. The ASB only reacted in the Windsor Smith case when audience complaints were received. Of course, the ASB does not operate within a legislative framework; has no ability to punish advertisers that display offensive material and it operates with no mandate to engage in preventative activities such as pre-vetting: all of which raise future avenues for research regarding the effectiveness of advertising self-regulation in Australia. Lastly, the government itself could be deemed liable for distancing itself from the regulation of outdoor advertising altogether and allowing an under-performing self-regulatory regime operate.

The situation is complicated. Sexual harassment legislation has been written for sites such as workplaces and educational institutions, rather than public space more broadly. Therefore, this article is merely suggesting that sexist outdoor advertising be *considered* with the same level of seriousness that pin-ups in the workplace are given that there are many similarities between the two media but only one is prohibited legally. This article is not a recommendation for legislation reform, although further research into such possibilities is strongly advocated.

### The pin-up

In order to illustrate how contemporary outdoor advertising looks and functions in a similar manner to pin-ups, the actual pin-up medium needs to be explored. Termed by Tiftt in her article on sexual harassment as the "workingman's constant companion" (Tiftt, 1991, p. 61), the origins of this medium date back to the nineteenth century (Solomon-Godeau, 1996). Martignette and Meisel in their book *The Great American Pin-up* describe the pin-up as:

"[an image] that shows a full length view of its subject and characteristically has an element of a theme or some kind of story. The woman in the pin-up is usually dressed in a form-revealing outfit... Sometimes, a pin-up may be shown as a nude..." (Martignette & Meisel, 1996, p. 22).

The link between outdoor advertising and pin-ups is by no means tenuous: Pin-ups have long been popular components of advertisements (Beyer, 2000) and similarly, advertising pin-ups have long been popular elements of contemporary culture, with many

advertising posters gaining popularity independent of the product they advertise. While, as this article will explore, there are many grounds on which sexist advertising and pin-ups can be connected, the commercial and popular culture nature of both helps to distance both products from being written-off as 'art'. As art historian Maria Buszek notes in her paper "Of Varga Girls and Riot Grrrls", "unlike the fine art images that it partially appropriated, the pin-up was aimed as a popular audience..." (Buszek, undated, n.p.). Research exists celebrating the artistic merit of both advertising (Henderson & Landau, 1980; Heon, 1999) and pin-ups (Beltran, 2002; Bernard, 1999; Betrock, 1993; Beyer, 2000; Collins, 2001; Collins, 2002; Reid, 1997). Of course, while both products may be interpreted as aesthetically pleasing or creative, both products were designed for purposes *other* than art. Advertiser Jack Taylor, warns "[d]on't confuse selling with art" (in Rothenberg, 1994, p. 113). While seemingly innocuous, Taylor's statement is referring to the fact that advertising is primarily about peddling products, just as pin-ups are about the retail of images of women. Andrea Dworkin in an essay titled "Vargas' Blonde Sambos", criticises pin-ups, claiming "the drawings are valued because male masturbation is the generous response to female emptiness however expressed or articulated" (Dworkin, 2000, n.p.). The masturbation connotations of pin-ups will be returned to later in this article, suffice it to say, Dworkin's comment reflects the overt sexual function that the pin-up serves, again distancing the images from other kinds of non-commercial art. While both products may also have artistic merit, such merit is not the primary explanation for their worth.

While extensive research may document the pin-up as an artform, aside from the aforementioned Dworkin article, very little exists about the sexual politics of the pin-up. The absence of such research is an interesting phenomenon, given that pin-ups are listed by HREOC as an example of sexually harassing behaviour. The comments from Scollay quoted earlier, reflect that there is much to unpack regarding the power dynamics that pin-ups reflect and produce. This article will identify and explore some of the problems with the pin-up medium from a feminist perspective and will later explore how these analyses are similarly applicable to sexist outdoor advertisements.

While it may seem obvious that a pin-up can be interpreted as primarily sexual – as Dworkin claims "the meaning is masturbatory" (Dworkin, 2000, n.p.) – little research exists exploring the sexual politics being played out when a boy tacks a pin-up to a wall and uses the image for sexual gratification. I propose some

explanations for this research void. Firstly, it might be suggested that the masturbatory appeal of the pin-up is so obvious, that further explanation is redundant. This idea can be illustrated by cultural references to the famous Farrah Fawcett pin-up from the 1970s where the actress was pictured in a revealing red bathing suit. Perhaps simply mentioning this poster *implies* that a boy in possession of it was using it sexually. A webpage providing advice for parents fearing their children might be homosexual claims that "simple observation can determine if the child is basically heterosexual", with one such observation being if the boy "has a picture of Farrah Fawcett on his wall" (Webkamasutra.com). Perhaps it is common knowledge that you would not gain appreciation from such an image *unless* you had a sexual reaction to it. If the pin-up/masturbation link is so obvious, then again, it is reiterating Dworkin's point that the value of pin-ups is primarily masturbatory, which again devalues artistic exoneration of the images and raises particular concerns when so much outdoor advertising looks like pin-ups.

An alternative explanation for the lack of feminist research on the pin-up is that perhaps the medium is viewed simply as a subset of the broader category of pornography, whereby a separate sexual political analysis would repeat existing research (Faust, 1981; Jeffreys, 2000; Kutchinsky, 1990; MacKinnon & Dworkin, 1988; Morgan, 1980; Russell, 1998; Wilson, 1995; Zillman & Bryant, 1990). While the term pin-up all too often calls to mind the "classic" 1950s-type cheesecake images by artists such as Gil Elvgren and Alberto Vargas, pin-ups are still being produced today, and are still being called pin-ups even though the levels of explicitness has changed. A 2005 pin-up by Kevin Clarke titled "Kicking Back" shows a woman lying on her back, her only item of apparel, a pair of knee-high, red and black patent-leather boots. Both breasts (and nipples) are visible, and a small strip of pubic hair can be seen (Clark, 2005). In Anthony Guerra's, 2003 pin-up, "Secret Sin", a woman is positioned on her back, naked again, except for a pair of knee high boots. Her eyes are closed, her lips slightly parted, one hand is in her hair. While a black cloth runs from under her breasts and between her legs covering her genitals, the positioning of her hand between her legs (on top of the cloth) indicates this is a masturbatory scene (Guerra, 2003). Such explicit references to sexual performance were not commonplace in 'classic' pin-ups, but are routine staples of pornography now. The change in levels of explicitness in pin-ups is important because it is reflecting the normalisation and mainstreaming of certain kinds of sexualised images. The illustrated cheesecake pin-ups



were once deemed risqué however, their contemporary acceptance has resulted in the images being mainstreamed to the extent that they now appear on packaging for cosmetics such as American brand Benefit and Australian brand Glamourflage. Such classic pin-ups are also routinely celebrated as art (Beltran, 2002; Bernard, 1999; Betrock, 1993; Beyer, 2000; Collins, 2001; Collins, 2002; Reid, 1997). The idea of classic pin-up images being commonplace reflects the successful mainstreaming of erotic images of women into the public sphere. Anette Dina Sørensen suggests that this mainstreaming has occurred because pornography has merged with mass culture, through its appearance in advertising, music videos, television and in fashion magazines (Sørensen, 2003). This article suggests that just as classic pin-ups are now seen as tame and sufficiently arty for packaging cosmetics, more explicit pin-ups are now needed to spark male sexual interests, and similarly more explicit advertising images are needed to get the attention of the audience.

Perhaps little feminist research exists on the pin-up because the distinction between it and pornography is so moot. Both media focus on the sexualised appearance of the women displayed and the appeal of both is primarily sexual. Both media have traditionally been used to incite masturbation, so perhaps analysing pin-ups separately has been deemed unnecessary.

While feminist analyses of pin-ups may not be obvious in existing literature, writing does exist discussing the importance of the pin-up to male adolescent culture. George Lois in a *New York Times* article claims “I remember nothing that made me happier during my adolescent years than the monthly arrival on the newsstands of the Petty Girl in the pages of *Esquire*” (Lois, 1997, n.p.). Similarly, William Dietrich in *The Seattle Times* reflects, “[l]ike an adolescent who never forgets a pin-up, hot rod or rock song that poignantly captures the most impressionable years...” (Dietrich, 2002, n.p. ).

While classic-style pin-ups of the “Petty Girl” may no longer be blu-tacked on adolescent boys’ walls, it does not mean that the influence of the pin-up has waned. The basic idea of a pin-up is to provide an inexpensive, mass-produced image of a woman for a man’s viewing pleasure. The very idea of posting an image of a woman on a wall is not a new thing. Joel Sanders in an article on gender in architecture claims that “architects since Vitruvius have associated the ornamented surface with femininity, not masculinity” (Sanders, 1996, p. 79). While boys may no longer be posting Farrah Fawcett pin-ups on their walls because their tastes have changed, the desire to look at

sexualised images of women has not waned. Similarly, men’s desire to *display* such images publicly has not diminished. As will shortly be discussed, numerous examples exist of outdoor advertising bearing very strong resemblance to the traditional masturbatory pin-up images. The consequence of moving pin-ups out of the bedroom and into the public sphere is that in just the same way that a pin-up turns a boy’s bedroom into a sexualised space, the sexist outdoor advertisement functions to render public space similarly sexualised. The key difference however, and the ultimate reason why the advertisement becomes harassing, is that just as legislation determines that a pin-up has no place in the workplace, masturbatory images are inappropriate in public space (see Rosewarne, 2005).

### Sexist outdoor advertisements as pin-ups

In order to deem sexist outdoor advertisements as sexual harassment, the idea of a sexist advertisement as a pin-up needs to be established. This will be done by identifying how both sets of images are visually similar; how in both a workplace and public space setting audiences are held captive to the images and how both images work to masculinise public space in a way that makes women feel out of place and excluded.

Firstly, it should be established how outdoor advertising and pin-ups tend to be visually similar. As part of my PhD dissertation, I undertook a year long data collection of outdoor advertisements in Melbourne, Australia. All outdoor advertisements that I passed during my daily commute (that contained photographic representations of identifiable central male or female characters), were photographed and the dataset was then analysed through a content analysis method. The findings of this study illustrate well comments made by Martignette and Meisel (1996), as well as those made by Dworkin. Firstly, Martignette and Meisel (1996) claim that pin-ups tend to show a “full length view” of the subject. I investigated the cropping of photographs to determine at what point of the body the image ended. The analysis of my data supports Martignette and Meisel’s claim of the likelihood of a “full length view”. While both men and women were more likely to be portrayed in full body shots as opposed to facial shots in outdoor advertisements, this trend was more distinct for women: 66% of females were found in the two categories where the greatest amount of body was displayed, in comparison to only 50% of males portrayed similarly.

This predominant focus on bodies is an interesting and problematic trend. Hall and Crum for example,

argue that a consequence of focusing on bodies rather than faces is that the inferred message is that “women are ‘bodies’ rather than ‘somebodies’” (Hall & Crum, 1994, p. 335). Dodd et al. argue that through the different levels of importance placed on the body, as opposed to the face, a subtle message is sent: i.e., that while intelligence and personality are communicated through faces, only attractiveness is communicated through the body (Dodd, Harcar, Foerch, & Anderson, 1989). Archer et al. claim that the more prominent the body in the photograph, the more important non-intellectual qualities such as attractiveness and emotion rate (Archer, Iritani, Kimes, & Barrios, 1983). The predominance of body shots of women in my data collection indicates that presentations fall sway to the objectified-woman stereotype that feminists have long been bemoaning (Friedan, 1963; Kilbourne, 1999). The pin-up of course is a far more overt illustration of this, where a woman’s *exclusive* value is pinned to her appearance. Dworkin’s description of the visual elements of the pin-up help illustrate this:

“Vargas’ subject – or object, to be more precise – is some lazy, fetishistic view of white women, pale women, usually blonde; the drawing itself delineates the boundaries of nonexistence, a white, female nonentity... There [is] no fat because there is no flesh” (Dworkin, 2000, n.p.).

Dworkin’s description coincides well with my PhD data analysis. Of the 137 advertisements with female central characters that I analysed, 93% of those portrayed were white-skinned. Interestingly, while the analysis of my advertisements conflicts with Dworkin’s comments regarding ‘blonde’ (only 35% of my female characters were blonde, compared to 52% brunette), the idea of there being “no fat because there is no flesh” is precisely the results my analysis reached. My study used the nine-point Contour Drawing Rating Scale devised by Thompson and Gray (Thompson & Gray, 1995) which is a scale often used in body-image research (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Furnham, Badmin, & Sneade, 2002; Patel & Gray, 2001; Riva, 1998). My analysis indicated that 71% of the females portrayed were identifiable as being at the four thinnest points of the nine-point scale.

Of particular importance is Dworkin’s description of the pin-up as a “nonentity”, a theme that ties in well with classic feminist arguments claiming women’s objectification in advertising (Friedan, 1963; Kilbourne, 1999). The pin-up’s “nonentity” status is first established by the focus on her body rather than her face, this process rendering personality and identity of little interest: as

illustrated in both advertising and pin-ups. My data also supports this “nonentity” status in that just under half of the women portrayed were photographed on plain or neutral backgrounds, as opposed to being situated in a specific setting (i.e., a kitchen, workplace or outdoors). Allan and Coltrane, in their comparison of gender displays in television commercials from the 1950s compared to the 1980s, noted that in the 1980s, 70% of women were pictured as “free-floating” — i.e., that their display was without reference to work or family activity (Allan & Coltrane, 1996: 192). While the authors do not devote any time to explaining this “free-floating” phenomenon, their description does provide an interesting way to think about the high number of women portrayed in studio settings in my data. A possible explanation for this “free-floating” could be that this is again something that emphasises women’s non-entity status: i.e., if women were shown in a workplace or the home one may be given insight into their identity; something that would be a wasted effort if the real focus is on their appearance. Dworkin questions, “[i]f women existed in any one of these drawings, would men be similarly aroused; or is the absence itself the turn-on?” (Dworkin, 2000, n.p.). Perhaps, just as making these women non-entities means that no distractions from appearance are provided, it is not only lack of identity and personality that is arousing for the male audience but the ‘absence’ is appealing too: i.e., absence of intellect, absence of a challenge. Of course, the fantasy element present in both media might suggest that the women have been included simply for their ability to arouse, therefore their engagement in any activities other than posing would detract – and distract – from her primary task.

The classic pin-up images often portray women in underwear, lingerie or swimwear. Interestingly, in my data analysis there were 13 examples of women portrayed in lingerie or underwear and another 13 portrayed in swimwear. Interestingly, of these 26 images, only 6 were actually advertising lingerie, underwear or swimwear! This statistic illustrates a very blatant use of pin-up-style images to draw attention to an unrelated product. Just as previous research has detailed direct references to pornography in outdoor advertising (Roseworn, 2005), as these underwear, lingerie and swimwear images illustrate, there are many specific examples whereby the outdoor advertising medium is referencing (if not directly copying) the pin-up medium. This point will be illustrated by drawing from examples included in my data collection.

A 2003 outdoor advertisement for Rexona ‘body refreshers’ depicts a seated woman wiping her neck with

a “body refresher” towelette. Her shirt is open revealing her bra, and her skirt is short and flared, enabling both knees and the majority of one calf to be displayed. A seated woman engaged in grooming is a common pin-up pose, but a specific pin-up that this Rexona advertisement bares resemblance to is a 1956 Elvgren pin-up titled “All Set” (Elvgren, 1956). This image shows a woman seated similarly, wearing a low cut, cleavage-revealing dress, with the skirt flared and positioned to the side so that her bare legs can be revealed. She is posed about to powder her nose. The Rexona image can also be likened to a 1954 Zoë Mozart pin-up titled “Specially For You” (Mozert, 1954). Again, the woman is portrayed wearing a low-cut dress pushed aside so that her legs are displayed. In this picture, the woman is sitting atop a haystack eating strawberries.

Another 2003 Rexona advertisement, shows a woman wiping her neck, shirt open, bra-displayed, leaning back against a car. The image of a sexualised woman portrayed with a car is a pin-up staple. A Bill Medcalf pin-up from the late 1940s shows a woman in a fitted white jumpsuit, seated on a car, her jumpsuit unzipped to draw attention to cleavage and large breasts (Medcalf, c.1940s). An Elvgren pin-up from 1950 titled “Jill Needs Jack”, shows a woman with a fitted brown dress and very large breasts, sitting on the bumper bar of a car, holding a mirror and about to apply lipstick (Elvgren, 1950).

A 2003 L'Oréal Paris advertisement shows a naked woman bent at the waist, her breasts touching her knees, her nipples not visible, her face cropped out. This manner of presenting a woman completely naked without actually showing nipples or genitals is a theme prominent in pin-ups. An Elvgren pin-up titled “Bare Essentials” from 1957, shows a naked woman getting dressed in a jungle (Elvgren, 1957). While we can see she is naked, her arm obscures her nipples, and a raised knee conceals her genitals. In an undated Mozart pin-up c.1950, a naked woman is kneeling down, her breasts and genitals again concealed (Mozert, c.1950). Numerous pin-ups done by George Petty in the 1950s and 1960s also follow this theme. A particularly interesting example is a woman posed similarly to the aforementioned Mozart pin-up, with her face completely obscured by her hair (Petty, c.1950s/1960s).

A naked woman, shot from behind with half of a buttock (but no anal cleavage visible), was the central image for a 2003 Samsung advertisement. The image of a naked woman portrayed with a focus on her bare back can be likened to an Elvgren work from 1948 titled “Jeepers, Peepers” (Elvgren, 1948). The image is near identical to the Samsung advertisement, except the

cropping is different; in the pin-up, the woman's face and submerged legs are visible. A Bill Randall work from the 1950s/1960s, again positions the woman in the same manner as the Samsung and Elvgren work, but turns her body slightly to also include the side of a breast (Randall, c.1950s/1960s). In the 2003 Heaven ice-cream outdoor advertising campaign, naked women were portrayed submerged face down in ice creams, most of their breasts and genitals concealed. Such posing is witnessed in pin-ups, notably an Edward Runci image from 1965 titled “Record Catch”, which shows a topless woman posed the same way, but submerged in the ocean, her bikini caught on a fishing hook (Runci, 1965).

Lastly, a 2003 Rosemount wine advertisement shows a woman skipping through a rain shower of berries, shielded by a large umbrella. This pose, and notably the use of an umbrella as a prop, is similar to numerous pin-ups: A 1939 Elvgren pin-up titled “Disturbing Elements” has a woman seated on a trunk, an umbrella shielding her from a downpour (Elvgren, 1939). An Elvgren image from the 1940s titled “Skirting Trouble”, shows a woman with a yellow parasol walking a German Shepherd, while she inspects a ladder in her pantihose (Elvgren, c.1940s). A 1947 Elvgren image titled “I've Been Spotted” depicts a woman with an orange parasol, lifting up her dress to show off black stockings (Elvgren, 1947).

A criticism of pin-ups presented by this article – and one that similarly applies to outdoor advertising – is that very narrow representations of what constitutes beauty are illustrated. On the first level, this can be understood as a problem because each medium can be interpreted as being prescriptive for what men should be attracted to. This point is illustrated by Lois in his article about the pin-up:

“We all have our sexual fantasies, and I was forced to confess to mine... I can't remember if I was a leg man before I saw my first Petty Girl, but he certainly helped develop my eye, and his work made the 40s the era of the leg. Just as the cool, unapproachable Gibson Girl was the feminine ideal of young men at the turn of the century, the voluptuous Petty Girl, telephone in hand, became the ideal of their wide-eyed sons.” (Lois, 1997, n.p.).

Just as Lois' article indicates, pin-ups help define what men find attractive, in the process they are also helping define the way women should aspire to look. This idea illustrates an interesting cross-over between advertising and pin-ups, whereby in the days of the classic pin-ups advertisers actually took advantage of pin-up appeal to exploit female body insecurity:

Buszek's article discusses advertising for Jergens cosmetics which encouraged women to "Be his Pin-up Girl" (Buszek, undated, n.p.). The idea of sexual images – notably pornography – mainstreaming certain attributes such as hairless genitals and therefore encouraging men to expect such aesthetics – as well as prompt women to mimic them – are issues discussed in Sheila Jeffreys' *Beauty and Misogyny* where she analyses porn-inspired trends such as Brazilian waxing and labiaplasty (Jeffreys, 2005). While pin-ups and pornography may contribute to engagement with beauty practices as Jeffreys' argues, it is difficult – if not impossible – to directly connect pin-ups and advertising to other negative consequences. This said, research *has* implicated the media in negatively affecting body image and self esteem through the promotion of unrealistic beauty images (Durkin & Paxton, 2002; Lavine, Sweeney, & Wagner, 1999; Myers & Biocca, 1992; Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994). When outdoor advertising is taking its inspiration from pin-ups and utilising almost exclusively young, thin, white female models, the large number of women who do not fit this archetype may be left prone to the negative consequences that may ensue.

Another criticism of pin-ups, and one particularly applicable to a feminist critique of advertising imagery, is the different ways men and women are portrayed in them. Cinema theorist, Richard Dyer, has written extensively about the male pin-up (Dyer, 1992). Dyer's research reminds us not to forget that adolescent girls also pin posters of male heart throbs onto their walls. This reminder is a point often raised by critics of feminist work on advertising who note that men are also sexualised in advertising (Bordo, 1999; Ehrenreich, 1983; LaFrance, 1995; Light, 2002; Mosse, 1996; Rohlinger, 2002). The important point to note here however, is that in my data analysis, 77.5% of the central characters in outdoor advertising were women. This on its own makes female portrayals of far greater concern than a far smaller number of male portrayals. Also, it should be noted that when men are included in advertising, their posing is different to female presentations, a point well made by Dyer: "[w]here the female model typically averts her eyes, expressing modesty, patience and a lack of interest in anything else ... [t]he male pin-up, even at his most benign, still stares at the viewer..." (Dyer, 1992, p. 104-9).

Dyer's ideas very much parallel feminist critique of outdoor images which argue that sexualised images of men and women simply cannot be analysed in the same manner. Feminist sociologist Eva Cox summarises this idea well: "[y]ou can't always apply the same gender

analysis... Objectifying women on its own is not a problem. But part of the problem is that it feeds into the idea that women are just there to be fucked" (True lies, 2004, n.p.).

Another critique of advertising and pin-ups is their shared relationship with pornography. Lois' article discusses *Playboy* founder, Hugh Hefner, who claims that a Petty bunny costume inspired his *Playboy* Bunny (Lois, 1997). Perhaps a stronger link is Hefner's own claim that pin-ups were *Playboy's* ultimate inspiration:

"The idea to use naked girls in *Playboy* came from serving in the war—that was the time when pin-ups enjoyed major celebrity because soldiers pinned up the pictures on the barracks. The pictures were drawings done by George Petty or Alberto Vargas, and they were inside men's magazines" (Hefner, 2003, n.p.).

Buszek argues that through the "new kind of pin-up – the "Playmate"" – Hefner helped "fill the void left by the disappearance of images of the sexualized female in broader popular culture" which had come to an end due to – among other social changes – feminism (Buszek, undated, n.p.). It could therefore be argued that just as pin-ups inspired *Playboy* and contributed to the acceptance of sexualised images of women, they also prompted the mainstreaming of these images into popular culture with their move into the public sphere through media such as outdoor advertising (Roseworne, 2004, 2005).

An important manner in which sexist outdoor advertisements can be likened to pin-ups in the workplace is the way in which audiences of both media are held captive. In his article on free speech and hostile environments, Jack M. Balkin argues that "[s]imply put, a person trapped in a hostile work environment is a 'captive audience' for First Amendment purposes with respect to the speech and conduct that produce the discrimination" (Balkin, 1999, p. 17). Balkin quotes from the judgment in the aforementioned *Robinson v. Jacksonville Shipyards* case where Judge Melton claimed "female workers... are a captive audience in relation to the speech that comprises the hostile work environment" (Balkin, 1999, p. 17). Like employees in a workplace where pin-ups are displayed, viewers of outdoor advertisements come to constitute a captive audience because they are unable to avoid the imagery displayed. Connecting "captive audience" ideas to advertising is not unprecedented: These issues were combined in the 1974 U.S. case of *Lehman v. City of Shaker Heights* where a ban on political advertising on public buses was upheld on the grounds that passengers were a "captive audience" (Bjorkman, 1986).



The sexualisation of space that both pin-ups in the workplace and outdoor advertising achieves raises some important public policy issues. In Joshua Goldstein's book *War and Gender*, he explores the popularity of the pin-up in World War II, notably amongst the US forces. He discusses that while the pin-up craze was being criticised by moralists, officers determined that pin-ups actually contributed to soldiers' morale (Goldstein, 2001). Demonstration of masculinity is an essential task of a soldier (Brownmiller, 1975; Copelon, 1994; Enloe, 1983, 1987, 2000; Lentin, 1997; Moser & Clark, 2001; Reardon, 1985; Stiglmayer, 1994) and engagement in sex acts is often noted as an important way for a man to act out masculinity and maintain morale, an idea prominent in literature regarding prevalence of rape and use of prostitutes during times of conflicts (Moser & Clark, 2001; Nikolic-Ristanovic, 1996; Stiglmayer, 1994; Sturdevant & Stoltzfus, 1992).

The morale-boosting function of pin-ups helps explain the function of sexist outdoor advertisements in public space: just as the pin-up excites the soldier and reinforces his masculinity, the sexist advertisement can be understood to excite the male passers-by, marking the space as a male domain. In his judgment in *Robinson*, Judge Melton wrote that such a "boys' club" atmosphere was "no less destructive to workplace equality than a sign declaring "Men Only"" (in (Tift, 1991, p. 61). Such a comment is reiterated by the comments made by Scollay cited earlier, in relation to such images working to "solidify" inclusion of men and thus exclude others in a workplace. Comments made by victims of sexual harassment highlight the socially exclusionary consequences of exposure to such pin-ups. Lynne Larkin experienced sexual harassment during her time working for the CIA in the U.S., where the harassment included exposure to "pin-ups". Larkin claims that a problem with the culture she worked in was "[t]hey don't get it that it sends a message to all women that this is what they think of them" (*The angry women of the CIA: discrimination and sexual harassment are among the complaints made against the agency*, 1995, n.p.). Larkin's sentiments are echoed in a 1992 Western Australian case where two women engaged in a sexual harassment suit against their employer, miner Press Clough Joint Venture. Prior to the case going to court, the two women had requested pin-ups and pornography be removed from their workplace. While their employer did remove some of the offensive material, following this, the two women were subjected to derogatory comments being written about them on walls around the workplace, including in the men's toilets (Desiatov & Robson, 1992). If pin-ups can make a woman feel excluded and objectified in a workplace

environment, it would be naïve to think such emotions are not replicated when an outdoor advertisement similar to a pin-up is displayed in public space (see Rosewarne, 2005, for an extended discussion of this idea).

The linking of sexist advertising to sexual harassment is not a new thing. In 1991 in the U.S., four women engaged in a successful sexual harassment suit against their employer, Stroh Brewery. Part of the plaintiffs' claims was that their harassment was motivated by advertising campaigns including the Old Milwaukee "Swedish Bikini Team" beer advertisement. The infamous campaign, featured large-breasted blonde women in bikinis brought in to party with a small group of men. The female employees at the Brewery claimed that the sexism portrayed in the commercial permeated the company and caused sexual harassment in the workplace (Schultz, 1998). Similar kinds of sexual harassment inspired by advertising have occurred in Australia, notably concerning harassment of female bartenders inspired by a beer campaign (see Rosewarne, 2005).

It should also be noted that there are examples of sexual harassment actually *in* advertisements. In 2004, a French advertisement for designer Sisley showed a woman having her breast groped by a male hand (Thiessen, 2004). Also in 2004, Galeries Lafayette, a French department store, depicted model Laetitia Casta with a black eye (Thiessen, 2004). In Australia in 1993, a case against four women accused of vandalising a billboard depicting a woman being sawn in half was dismissed, the magistrate noting that "[t]he real crime in this matter was the erection of these extremely offensive advertisements... (Sweet Justice, 1993, p.39). Perhaps it was, therefore, only a matter of time before sexual harassment became not only a consequence of, but actual inclusion in outdoor advertisements. Sexual harassment in advertising reflects not only attention-getting techniques being deployed by advertisers, but also the mainstreaming and normalisation of the sexualised violence apparent in contemporary pornography.

### **Thinking about sexist advertising as sexual harassment**

Using language such as "sexual harassment" is important because it is a term people are familiar with and it is something backed up by legislation. The threat of repercussion grounded in sexual harassment litigation is something that could make advertisers potentially cautious. Garfield argues that the Stroh Brewery case discussed earlier was "a force more powerful than the most inflammatory screeds of Dworkin, Catherine McKinnon [sic], and Susan Faludi put together"

(Garfield, 2003, p. 76). It was more powerful than feminist “screeds” because it was about money: Garfield notes that Old Milwaukee’s sales dropped “precipitously” in the wake of the court case (Garfield, 2003, p. 76). While female self-esteem and inclusion is unlikely to be of interest to most corporations, litigation is. The costs of sexual harassment litigation are well documented (Governor’s Task Force on Sexual Harassment, 1993), as are costs associated with financial compensation, opportunity costs, staff morale, absenteeism, employee turnover and productivity (Deen, undated; HREOC, 1996; Lardner, Lackaff, Schwartz, Roebuck, & Hammell, 1998; Public Service and Merit Protection Commission, 1999; Van Zandt, 2001; Walters, 2000). Another detrimental cost – as illustrated by the Stroh Brewery case – is bad publicity (Aalberts & Seidman, 1996). It should of course, be noted that sometimes “bad” publicity is actually an overt intention of the advertiser. Australian advertiser John Singleton typifies this idea, commenting on a controversial beer advertisement he produced for Eagle Bitter in the 1990s: “[m]en figure that they [‘feminazis’] hate us, we hate them so it’s a positive if they hate the advertising for our beer” (Are offensive ads more effective?, 1998, n.p.). While legislation does not currently include outdoor advertising, if it did, the threat of such high costs following sexual harassment claims, may prove a significant deterrent to advertisers producing harassing images.

This article acknowledges that using sexual harassment as a way of thinking about outdoor advertising presents difficulty outside of academia. Of course, the irony that underpins this difficulty is worth acknowledging. Martin L. Gross, in his opinion piece on sexual harassment, notes the irony between sexual harassment laws in a culture that is otherwise saturated with such imagery: “In sexual harassment, it has ruled that a woman can sue if the work environment is “hostile” because of pin-up pictures, a Puritan concept in a sex-drenched society” (Gross, 1997, n.p.). While Gross’s article is actually a critique on what he terms “political correctness”, he reiterates an important question: i.e., how are pin-ups in the workplace any different than what we see in on our billboards? Pin-ups, as discussed earlier, have had a long history of inclusion in advertising and are similarly identified as sexually harassing behaviour by HREOC. If sexual pin-ups, posters, cartoons and graffiti are prohibited in workplaces, why are they tolerated in public space?

## Conclusion

While this article maintains that the incorporation of sexist outdoor advertisements into sexual harassment

legislation should be considered, this article is not formally recommending this. Instead, this article presents sexual harassment as a new framework for understanding the harms of sexual harassment, suggesting “sexual harassment” as a way for these images to be critiqued and protested against. Just as pin-ups are sexualised and objectified images of women, so too are too many outdoor advertisements. Understanding these advertisements as sexually harassing masturbatory images may be one way to deliver the issue some well-earned public policy attention.

While there is obvious difficulty in translating the academic argument presented in this article into policy reform, nonetheless, numerous other avenues for policy development are raised. This article has demonstrated that there is an obvious problem with the content of outdoor advertising. In Australia, and in most of the Western world, outdoor advertising is “controlled” through self-regulation. The self-regulator in Australia, the ASB, like most advertising self-regulators, has very limited powers. The body does not, for example, have the power to remove offensive advertising, nor does it have the power to financially penalise recalcitrant advertisers. Given the popularity of self-regulation amongst the major stakeholders, it stands to reason that self-regulatory bodies are the ideal focal point for reform to the way advertising is controlled. This is, of course, an obvious area for future research.

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