



**HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION**

Disability & Community Services Commissioner
Children & Young People Commissioner

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
eca.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senators,

Inquiry into the Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media Environment

Role of the ACT Human Rights Commission

The ACT Human Rights Commission is established pursuant to the *Human Rights Commission Act 2005* (the HRC Act). It commenced operation on 1 November 2006. The objects of the HRC Act include:

- promotion of the human rights and welfare of people living in the ACT by making recommendations to government and non-government agencies on legislation, policies, practices and services that affect vulnerable groups in the community.¹
- promotion of the rights of users of disability services, health services, services for children and young people and services for older people and
- promotion of improvements in services for those groups.²

Broader Impact of Media Images on Young People

The Commission is conscious of the need to understand from young people how advertising (and images in the media more broadly) impacts on them. We have not been approached by any individual young person in the ACT concerned about issues such as those outlined in the Committee's terms of reference. We are unaware of any consultation that elicits their views. We suggest it is imperative for the Committee to ensure that young people's voices are heard in relation to these issues. The Committee needs to be clear about who media images and advertising most effect and the aims of this inquiry.

The Committee should resolve key questions such as: do adults have an idolised and sentimental view of children or do we actually have evidence-based concerns about negative impacts of the contemporary media environment on young people? And, how is our desire for a culture of personal and self-respect best realised?

Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media Environment

This being said, the Commission supports the Senate's inquiry and recognises the timeliness of this exercise. We are concerned about the proliferation of messages accessed through the media that may be confusing for young people and adults alike.

We wish to draw to the attention of the Committee a particular concern in relation to Internet advertising. Internet users can be subjected to advertising when accessing free resources. Ads

¹ s.6(a)(iii) of the HRC Act.

² ss.6(b) - (d) of the HRC Act.

gratuitously provide links to websites and content that can be considered misleading and inappropriate for younger users. Google's search engine and Gmail service select key words from the search entered or email conversation and provide targeted advertising based on those words. This arrangement is outlined in the Google Terms of Services:

17.1 Some of the Services are supported by advertising revenue and may display advertisements and promotions. These advertisements may be targeted to the content of information stored on the Services, queries made through the Services or other information.

17.2 The manner, mode and extent of advertising by Google on the Services are subject to change without specific notice to you.

17.3 In consideration for Google granting you access to and use of the Services, you agree that Google may place such advertising on the Services.³

It is clear from the information provided by Google to advertisers, that there is some filtering – targeted apparently more by commercial imperatives than 'age appropriate' searching. Information provided to prospective advertisers and those who want to use Google advertising states:

Competitive Ad Filter enables you to filter out specific competitors or specific advertisers.

Editorial Review makes sure that all Google ads are reviewed and approved by the Google team, ensuring that inappropriate ads don't appear on your pages.

Customizable default ads means that in the unlikely event that Google is unable to serve targeted ads on your page, we provide the option to display a default ad of your choice.⁴

It is unclear, however, how efficient these review and filtering mechanisms are. A simple search using the Google search engine for 'Girlfriend' a popular magazine aimed at early teens here in Australia (conducted in April 2008) results in a variety of possible links along with the following advertising:

[Photos of Cute Girls](#)

Browse photos of cute women near you. Free Online Dating and chat.

[Mate1.com](#)

[How To Get A Girlfriend](#)

Sexual Secrets You Can Use To Get Any Girl To Be Your **Girlfriend**

[DoubleYourDating.com](#)

Australian sites such as news.com.au and smh.com.au show Google advertising on their news pages. Social networking sites such as MySpace also rely on advertising. Advertising for 'dating agencies' and associated companies regularly feature. For example, when we visited

³ <http://www.google.com/accounts/TOS?hl=en>

⁴ https://www.google.com/adsense/login/en_US/?sourceID=ASO&subID=us-et-gmail&gsessionid=TRNI-D86eBU

the MySpace page for “Canberra People”⁵ in early April 2008, the following advertising was featured as “sponsored links”:

Meet Married Women Married But Looking? Meet Local Married Women Right Now.

Married-fling.comAsians Dating Canberra Join Free Now to Meet Sexy Asians for Hot Dates in Canberra

www.redhotpie.com.au100% Free Personals Meet singles in your area now. We're 100% free for everything!

DateHookup.comMeet Local Married Women Find Hot Married Women For Fun. Meet Local Married Women Right Now.

www.MarriedDaters.net

The Commission is aware of the complexity of issues surrounding Internet use and freedom of expression. We see no easy solution to our concerns. However, we draw this issue to the Committee’s attention in the hope that you can undertake inquiry of providers such as Google, MySpace and others to ascertain the technology can operate in ways that are more respectful of the interests of its younger users.

We thank the Committee for undertaking this inquiry and we are happy to expand on this submission if requested.

Yours sincerely,

Linda Crebbin
Children and Young People Commissioner
Disability and Community Services Commissioner

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⁵ <http://groups.myspace.com/canberra>