

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN IN THE CONTEMPORARY MEDIA ENVIRONMENT.

To: Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and The Arts, Department of the Senate, Parliament House, Canberra.

From the National Council of Women Tasmania Inc.

The National Council of Women Tasmania was founded in 1899 and has as one of its objects the well-being of children. The Council is an affiliate of the State body of NCW, and a member of NCW Australia and International Council of Women. NCWT is an umbrella organisation with twenty affiliated groups as well as individual associated members.

NCWT is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on this important matter. We consider, however, that the time frame is too short for a proper study and response to the topic. Because of the structure of our organisation, several delegates have significant experience in a wide range of community groups. One of our members has written of her experience as a leader in "Guides" covering many years.

1. Sources and beneficiaries of premature sexualisation of children.

NCWT has some difficulty with the phrase "premature" sexualisation as we are of the view that any sexualisation of children is detrimental to them and to society as a whole.

The sources and beneficiaries are in many cases identical - media, advertising agencies, investors and manufacturers of products to fill the created demand., parents wishing to "advance" their children in the "glamour" world of modelling. The beneficiaries also include pedophiles, sex addicts, and men (some women but the majority are men) jaded with the constant depictions of adult sexual violence on the screens and in print and desperate for something to give them a "high".

2. Evidence of inadvertent premature sexualisation of children - A guider's observations.

As a Girl Guide leader of girls aged 7-11 and 11-14 for 40 years and

Encouraging them to develop their own games and "play" every week, I have been made aware on many, many occasions over the last 20 years of how little girls have been influenced more and more towards premature sexualisation. Prior to 1985 little girls played or acted out *Winnie the Pooh, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and similar stories or *Adventure Island, Kimba the White Lion* etc.

From about 1985 onwards, the sexual influence of media programmes became more obvious, e.g. 8-9 years brining their Barbie dolls (and later the Bratz dolls) instead of teddies to camp or sleepovers, using psuedo "cinema" voices when asking each other about wearing bras, examining the size of their breasts, wearing junk jewellery and trying out make-up, some actually wearing false bras, talking about their "boy-friends", and acting out TV programmes like *"The Saddle Club"*, and *"Degrassi High"*, which were between than some children's programmes on commercial channels. All such encouraged a "gang and peer pressure", drama via "boyfriend problems", and disregard of teachers and parents. Most frequently their play was about being on stage or television and included a large number of the TV advertising jingles.

Even the so-called "acceptable" cartoons obviously had a tremendous influence on the children's play and sexualisation, including the way the girls and their mothers and female teachers and peers like *Nanette Nanoir* behave and are treated in TV cartoons, in e.g. *Rug Rats, Angela Anaconda*, etc. to name but two programmes.

The little girls in Guides had enough sense not to act this type of behaviour out in their plays when their parents were present, **but on their own, when they thought no adult was aware it was "their play lif"**.

The girls aged 11-13, when on their own, could scarcely talk about anything else but sex, not in the healthy, easy way of the pre-1985 youngsters, but of their "boyfriend" problems, and their obvious disrespect for most of their teachers and parents, often and acting out the more adult "soaps", including *Castaways, Reality TV*; singing unsuitable sexy pop music and rap, which left nothing to the imagination, reading and giggling over "girl" magazines before lights out, etc. (The Australian Broadcasting Commission has certainly contributed to the coarsening of our culture with programmes such as "Rage" which are often "taped" and watched later by young children and their older siblings).

These girls all came from very caring and thoughtful homes, with parents who probably had not idea how deeply the TV programmes (their children HAD to watch to keep in touch with their peers), were influencing their daughters when they were with their peer groups. At Guides one could help them choose more

wisely to help mitigate the effects of their daily dose of TV education, but this was only once a week, or at sleepovers and camps. These girls were the lucky ones, but the obvious influence was constantly there.

Of course, this influence extended to the very attractive girls and those from families less able to protect; it encouraged a number of these girls to seek actively to become models for advertising firms, for catalogues, etc. especially when the payment was so high. It made the fatter girls anxious and encouraged the less secure towards anorexia, as the research has clearly demonstrated.

We (NCWT) have written on a number of occasions expressing our concerns about particular programmes to various TV and radio stations and to Advertising Standards Board, the bodies charged with enforcing the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice and the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice, the Australian Broadcasting Commission and SBS. But at present such complaints are ineffective - the boards etc. appear so satiated with the constant diet of "the ugly" that there is no understanding of the impact on sensitive and developing personalities of "ugly" but seductive programmes

Strategies to prevent and or reduce the premature sexualization of children.

1. Making the actions of the Advertising Standards Board more transparent. increasing the size of the television regulatory watchdog with more power to curtail programmes which covertly as well as overtly encourage early sexualisation, disrespect for others and violence. It could cause a programme to be suspended until expert evidence can be gathered and notify the community and provide a period of community consultation if a complaint about a particular programme is received.
2. Reduce the amount of time any TV station is permitted to show cartoons.
3. Regulate, in particular radio programmes which contained sexually explicit lyrics.
4. Examine the culture of the popular girlie magazines - discourage the Promotion of Barbie, Ken and Bratz dolls with depiction of an unnatural body image.
5. Legislate to make it illegal with hefty fines for those providing or Accepting large payments for sexually orientated advertising/modelling using minors.

There seems to be a acceptance that sex education is obtained from the media and that such education commences at a very young age - well before the mental and development capacity of the child is ready. However, any suggestion that we should embrace a sex education programme devised in Canberra and imposed on a compulsory basis throughout all Australian schools is quite terrifying. No doubt the emphasis would be on condoms and the range of contraceptive pills without the concept that all relationships should be based on the dignity of the human person, respect for all and a curtailment of the concept "ME, first last and always".

Early childhood experts such as Steve Biddulph should be requested to examine and report on the impact of some of the progammes judged by the regulatory bodies as acceptable.