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100 Glen Park Rd  
Eltham North, VIC 3095  
Australia  
[www.enlightenededucation.com](http://www.enlightenededucation.com)  
[infomel@enlightenededucation.com](mailto:infomel@enlightenededucation.com)

18<sup>th</sup> April, 2008

Dear Members of the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts,  
*Re: Inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the contemporary media environment*

I am so pleased that this inquiry is taking place. I am the Victorian Program Director of Enlighten Education, a national company that works with teenage girls in schools, presenting workshops on body image, self esteem, deconstructing the media and more.

My concern is founded on the hundreds of girls that I speak with across Victoria, my two young boys and for the many young impressionable children across Australia.

From the many conversations I have with the girls that I work with, they surmise their world as follows: "sexy" equates to "cool". They also express their fears of having to look and act in ways that do not feel natural or seem too "grown up". I have met a number of girls who have shared their inner secrets with me, exposing stories of guilt and self doubt as a result of what they have seen and read through advertising and popular culture. Feelings of guilt and self doubt always emerge when we discuss the media's portrayal of products and people. The girls are aware that in this culture sex sells and with that comes low self esteem, poor self image, self doubt, confusion, and depression on a broad spectrum.

I obviously feel that the media has a big role in shaping the identities of each generation. The younger generations are now much more heavily targeted by advertisers and marketers than they were in the past and parents can only be accountable for so much. The standards and control of contemporary media in all its forms has undoubtedly slipped. This is evident in the TV advertisements that are shown at prime time on weekends, billboards, and advertising in "kids" magazines - examples of which I know you will be inundated with. Alternatively visiting the ASB website is another great source of examples (usually dismissed) of numerous accounts of advertising that is toxic and inappropriate for children.

Children should be given the chance to develop a healthy body image and self-esteem, without feeling overwhelmed and pressured to look and act like miniature adults. I feel that we are not allowing children to be children, and in effect we are running the risk of producing generations that are more likely to be confused, depressed, anxious and socially immature; missing the "important part" - developing a sense of self that can only be developed when exposed to as many facets of life as possible. Media is becoming increasingly important in their lives and it is therefore essential as adults WE ALL serve as powerful role models for our children. As adults it is therefore desirable to give greater priority to the interests of children in the area of media regulation. I applaud you in taking action, and only hope that this is just the beginning and from this, action becoming a reality. Let us do something before it is too late.

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission.

Many thanks,  
Sonia Lyne  
Enlighten Education Victorian Program Director