

**To: The Secretary,
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts.**

**Submission to the Senate Enquiry into the Sexualisation of Children in the
Media**

The Australian Government is to be highly commended for addressing what might be regarded as a desperate plight of the community, and parents in particular, to provide effective regulation of the media and advertising agencies.

The problem:

It has become apparent that increasingly degrading material is being imposed on an unwilling audience. There is in fact no way of avoiding contact with this incessant barrage in our daily lives, and, more importantly, of protecting children from its onslaught. Responsible parents are powerless to do so.

The psychological impact on children and youth is deeply distressing, to the extent that damage caused by exposure to such material has come to be recognised as a major factor in a serious increase of psychiatric disorders, youth suicide, drug use, and increase in crime. This has been the finding of research carried out by social agencies over a long period of time. Yet nothing changes.

The complaints mechanism is notoriously ineffective, with a result that individuals and groups concerned about the welfare of families are left with no redress. Making complaints has repeatedly proved to be an exercise in futility, as such complaints are frequently rebuffed in an arrogantly patronising manner, sometimes accompanied by direct insult.

Citizens who desire standards of decency and a wholesome environment in which to raise families, are labelled as "wowsers" and accused of being "out of step with community standards", which "standards" in fact appear to be dictated by an insolent minority, whose interest is focused on commercial profit, without respect for human rights and dignity, or the common good.

There is evidence that those who perpetrate offences of this kind continually compete with each other to make media content, and particularly advertising material, increasingly outrageous, confident in a knowledge that this can be done with impunity. Concerned parents and citizens seeking to complain are compelled to struggle through a maze of red tape, only to be scornfully rejected if they persevere.

We are told, "If you don't like it, turn it off!". Are those who object to offensive material to be excluded from access to the media? Every citizen has a right to view and listen to public entertainment without having his or her moral standards threatened.

Why is so called "freedom of expression" irresponsibly lauded over community welfare? A legitimate and important right of freedom of speech is about unrestricted expression of opinion and unhindered presentation of a point-of-view. Gratuitous wallowing in obscenity is not an exercise of a right to freedom of expression. Are not the welfare of the young and the viewing/listening rights of the community more important than the interests of those who claim to be permitted to do whatever they choose?

Key areas

Highly explicit sexual content, especially involving, or directed to, children.

Have we become a society of paedophiles? Children have a right to their innocence, and parents have a right to determine the time and manner of sex education.

Some media and advertising content is so gross that it may be likened to sexual abuse.

Exploitation of women and children by pornography has proved damaging to all concerned.

What about privacy in regard to intimate relationships? When sex is turned into a public spectacle, love degenerates into lust.

Gratuitous violence.

Is violence portrayed as an evil, or as "fun"?

Obscene language

If this is regarded as "natural" what does that say about our society? What an insult to the Australian citizen!

Recommendations:

1. Implementation of a legally recognised authority to represent the interests of families and the general community. Those who make up such a body need to be qualified for this office, i.e. be representatives of parents and pro-family groups. The *Advertising Standards Board* (financed by advertisers) and the *Office of Film and Literature Classification* have proved ineffective in regulating advertising and media content.

2. It is not enough to specify that "adult" material be confined to hours when it is unlikely that children would be viewing or listening. Even if this regulation were strictly enforced (which it is not) no real protection to minors is thereby provided. Moreover it is insulting to the majority of adult citizens to suppose that the staple "entertainment" of adults consists of pornography, gratuitous violence and foul language.

To protect youth and to halt cultural pollution, it is recommended that material of this kind be confined to those channels and stations who would be required to hold a licence for broadcasting such content, and that a numerical restriction be placed on such licence holders.

Some years ago social custom was geared to the smoker. The non-smoker didn't count. Since smoking has been recognised as a serious health hazard, it has been restricted to designated areas. Why cannot the same be done regarding offensive content in the media?

It is no accident that certain moral standards have been recognised throughout the ages, and that these are markedly similar among peoples of diverse religious and cultural background. Logically an action is either good or evil. It is unrealistic make-believe to suppose (under a theory of moral relativism) that an individual has a right to fabricate standards to suit personal whim, and to assume the validity of such "standards". The ancient Greek historian, Heroditus, considered that "custom is king" in relation to variation among different groups. However this same historian recognised the absolute evil of certain deeds, and indeed considered that such deeds are subject to punishment.

When we reach a stage when "anything goes" we become a decadent society. History has proved that decadent societies do not long survive.

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