



SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE ENQUIRY INTO THE SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN IN THE MEDIA

To Whom It May Concern,

I am the CEO of Enlighten Education (www.enlighteneducation.com), a national company that works with teenage girls in high schools exploring issues relating to body image, self esteem and enhancing outcomes for young women. My team is predominately made up of teachers, counsellors, and social workers – the majority are also parents of young children. We work with literally hundreds of school aged girls each week and were recently awarded Australian Small Business Champion of the Year for Children Services.

My team and I are all deeply concerned about the sexualisation of children by the media and have seen first hand that it is indeed impacting on our young women. My only dilemma in this submission – where to start?

Children of both genders are bombarded with images that promote the view that success and desirability in our society is dependent on one being beautiful, thin and hot, hot, hot. The images below were taken from prominent children's magazines. The juxtaposition of the photographs of readers and the celebrities and stories they are presented with highlights the concern I have about the appropriateness of some materials that are currently being presented, and directly marketed towards, impressionable young people:



It seems obvious to me that the young readers showcased here are being indoctrinated into a vacuous celebrity culture that is very adult – Sex in The City and The OC are both inappropriate for young

children. The women presented as role models are semi-naked and pouting, panting... do Molly and her pony really need to know "which starlet they are most like"?

Dolly and Girlfriend magazine may have a core readership of 14-17 year olds, yet many readers are known to be far younger than this. I am simply disgusted that these magazines, which often purport to be a "girl's best friend", also advertise mobile phone wallpaper and downloads that include slogans like: "You're My lover and my Star", "Save a Virgin, do me Instead" and multiple soft porn images of semi-naked adult men and women:



I regularly highlight incidents of the inappropriate sexualisation of our children in my blog written for parents and educators – The Butterfly Effect (<http://enlightenededucation.edublogs.org>). In this forum I have recently uncovered a number of alarming examples of the sexualisation of children that are worth bringing to your attention here too:

Music has become increasingly misogynist and sexual – many songs that are highly sexual are directly marketed towards young children. A British study found that watching video clips featuring skinny, semi naked gyrating women (in other words, watching 99% of all music clips) for just 10 minutes was enough to reduce teenage girls body satisfaction with their body shape by 10 per cent. Dr Michael Rich, spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics Media Matters campaign has gone so far as to state that exposure to misogynist music that portrays violence against women and sexual coercion as normal may effect other areas of young peoples lives and make it more difficult for them to know what is normal in a relationship.

Even the strongest of us admit to feeling less than they were after a dose of the Pussycat Dolls and Eminem - there is undeniably a nasty after taste. Yet look around, these sounds and their associated film clips are the very fodder we now give our children as the soundtrack to their youth. The Pussycat Dolls "Don't cha?" includes the lyrics "I know you want it...I know you should be on with me...don't cha wish your girlfriend was hot like me, don't cha wish your girlfriend was raw like me?". This anthem to the sisterhood featured on Hits for kids Volume 3 this Christmas, alongside songs by Hi 5 and Guy Sebastian. Alvin the Chipmunk sings "Don't cha" in his made for the pre-school set holiday film release.

Mainstream web sites promote highly inappropriate merchandise at young children:

Late last year I came across a web site aimed at young girls - www.girl.com.au . It claims to be "Empowering Girls Australia - wide." At the time, it was obviously aimed at pre-teens and young teens as

its home page promoted films including Disney's Enchanted, High School Musical, and the "Smart Cycle" -a toy for preschoolers. HOWEVER - it had a special page devoted just to brazilian waxing! This is the advice the site offered to young, pre-pubescent girls...

"The Brazilian bikini wax is an acquired taste and is not for everyone. Some women can endure the pain while others it's just too much to bare. For those of you interested in modeling it's a must, but I'd recommend a lead up before you take the plunge. Brazilian waxing involves spreading hot wax your buttocks and vagina area. A cloth is patted over the wax, then pulled off. Don't be alarmed if the waxer throws your legs over your shoulder, or asks you to moon them, this is normal and ensures there are no stray hairs. A tweezer is used for the more delicate areas (red bits). So why does it appeal. Nobody really likes hair in their private regions and it has a childlike appeal. Men love it, and are eternally curious about it."

You will be pleased to note that once the mainstream media heard about my outrage, the site did eventually remove the offending link (however, all initial attempts by Enlighten and other women's interest groups to have this link removed were completely ignored).

Finally, I have attached a further article of interest - 'The Grinch who stole innocence" this Opinion piece was co-written by myself and Ms Melinda Tankard Reist from Women's Forum Australia and was published in the Sydney Morning Herald, January 8th, 2008. It laments the loss of innocence and the infiltration of adult "raunch culture" into the playground.

I love the girls I work with deeply and passionately - they are beautiful, impressionable, joyous young women. Yet behind the facade of success, academically, socially and on the sporting field, our girls are in trouble. Any concerned parent or teacher will have noted with outrage the sexed up lifestyle being marketed to young children. Girls exist in a subtle, insidious world created by marketing hype, peer pressure and unrealistic self-expectation, and it is poisoning them at a most vulnerable age. And while they may appear to be coping with all that life throws at them, behind closed doors many are silently imploding. Young Australian girls are starving themselves, cutting themselves, binge drinking, being promiscuous and struggling to see light.

Enough.

Let there be light.

Best wishes with your important work

Dannielle Miller
CEO Enlighten Education
danni@enlighteneducation.com
1300 735 997
18/4/08

Turn to the next page for Attachment A

Attachment A

The Grinch who stole innocence –

First published in Opinion, Sydney Morning Herald, January 4th, 2008

Written by Dannielle Miller and Melinda Tankard Reist

Did our little darlings really need to receive hyper sexualised dolls for Christmas? Despite a refreshing increase in the sales of more educational toys such as board games and keyboards, Bratz dolls were still in the top 10 best seller list this year. Thanks to Santa there are now plenty of “Ho Ho Ho’s” sitting in playrooms just waiting to show our young girls that hot, thin, sexy - and completely useless - is way cool.

Look at the line up that toy shops promoted in the lead up to this Christmas.

Even good old Barbie who has previously been packaged as a teacher, astronaut and even as a US presidential candidate, is now doused in glitter, micro mini skirts and been given the obligatory party girl accessories.

“Bling, Bling, Bikini Barbie” comes with bikini, stilettos, thick make up, optional “Bling, Bling Spa” and a Pina Colada accessory.

“Sweet Love” Bratz wears fishnet stockings with the words “Baby Girl” on her midriff top. Another Bratz has detachable “Attitude Arms” which can be clipped on to her hips. What fun!

And oh the lucky little girl who received “Talking Bratz” under the Christmas tree. She is a ghetto girl - all bling, furs, cleavage and pout. She asks girls if they have their own bedroom in a voice which sounds like it comes straight from a 0055 phone sex ad.

“Head Bobs and Spins Bratz” looks like something you’d find on a pimp’s dashboard. Her role in life is to lie on a bed in her undies under a spinning disco light as her head wobbles.

While the boy dolls stuffed into stockings look active, powerful and in control the girl dolls focus only on their stockings.

Maybe the mini baby Bratz mechanic doll is different? Maybe she’s meant to empower girls by suggesting there’s more to life than preening yourself? But why is she only wearing lingerie?

What type of mechanic works like that?

The new dolls on the block, the ultra expensive “Lollipop Girls”, may not look like they’re owned by pimps but they are hardly offering empowered role models either. Described as “long, lean, young, sassy and impossibly beautiful”, their marketing material boasts they combine “youthful innocence with grown-up confidence and attitude.” At their recent Australian launch, little girls were treated to mock cocktails.

Why must we combine childhood with the adult world of fishnets, booze and “grown up confidence and attitude”? This is an incredibly dangerous combination.

Research shows a link between the premature sexualisation of our children and serious mental health problems like eating disorders and depression. We know too that drinking excessively has become a huge issue for teenage girls - recent surveys commissioned by Wesley Mission show that half say they drink alcohol, with one in five confessing to having done something they regret while they were drunk.

It would be too simplistic to argue that it is the dolls alone that are damaging our daughters, yet surely when we buy a plastic Paris Wannabe we are buying into an insidious trend to steal the innocence of childhood away. If it is OK to buy a lingerie clad Baby Bratz reclining on a revolving bed under a disco light - just what exactly is off limits?

Parents must start to say enough. At present, the silence is deafening.

Parents must also be particularly inventive in seeking ways in which they can offer their daughters engaging alternatives.

A friend's daughter was given a Lollipop Doll just before Christmas - and, as is so often the case - this was despite Mum trying to set limits and asking friends and relatives to stay away from Barbie and Bratz.

The little girl was confused when faced with this cross between Britney and a preschooler: "I don't understand why she has a little kid's face on a lady's body. Look, she has lady's breasts," she said to her mother.

The clever child, believing girls should be more than useless decorative objects, asked mum to turn the doll into a nurse. Which her clever Mum did, complete with university nursing degree (with red ribbon, in her pocket) and stethoscope.



So far, the new look nurse doll has saved the life of a large toy hippo.

Maybe she'll be able to do something about all the Generation Bratz girls who will start the New Year riddled with eating disorders and depression because they think they're not hot enough.