

Australian Senate Inquiry
into the sexualisation of children in the
contemporary media environment.

Written Submission

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SUMMARY

Children (as defined by law) are vulnerable, they do not have a sophisticated inner 'filtering' tool that assists them to understand abstract and complicated adult concepts such as '*informed consent*' to '*adult themes*' or '*adult behaviours*' before their brains and psyche are sufficiently developed to comprehend what these terms mean and they can develop the ability to make informed choices as they grow.

What commercial sexualisation of children via the media does, is bring children who are not at a developmental age or stage to *fully* comprehend the consequences of engaging in, or being presented with premature sexualised behaviours, dress, conversation or activity into a situation whereby they have no capacity to give informed consent to manipulated or coerced sexualised thinking, behaviour and/or dress to sell a product or image (or themselves). There is no compulsory media education in schools to assist children to learn how to 'filter' commercial material and messages they see on billboards, television, radio or in written media (that targets them). The Australian advertising and marketing standards are not necessarily reflective of developmental psychology and often appear to be broken or not supervised in media targeting children.

It is adults in the marketing branches of corporations and retail businesses, advertising agencies and the media who distribute sexualised material involving children without necessarily thinking about the suitability of the message to the targeted audience (or consumer), especially children. It is adults who aim for financial gain from 'branding' children to be lifelong consumers of their brand or product. It is adults who think that sexualising children alongside products or brands is a form of 'dress-ups' and doesn't harm the child. Younger and younger models are 'made-up' to look older and sexier than they are; children emulate the sexy dress of *adult* pop stars they see on music videos (which in themselves are highly sexualised). Console games and online games involve a lot of sexualised content that is not regulated. Children's anime and manga characters have pornographic versions available (made by adults overseas).

It is in the vast majority, adults who sexually abuse children (including their own), because they believe that children are sexually available and desirable. Commercial sexualisation of children via the media feeds this paedophilic view, without considering the ethics or rights of protecting uninformed, powerless, vulnerable peoples in accordance with International treaties.

Children have a right to not be sexually exploited for financial gain via the media; this needs to become legislated and enforceable. There is a massive difference between sexuality education that is age appropriate - and enforced, manipulative, mass media sexualisation of children without consideration of the consequences for the parents, the age of the children and the long-term message we are sending about the worth of an individual child. Is 'sexy' the only quality that makes a person valuable? It appears in Australian culture that this is becoming the benchmark.

DEFINITIONS:

Child Sexual Exploitation as defined by Hughes (1999) is,

“A practice by which a person, usually an adult, achieves sexual gratification, financial gain or advancement through the abuse or exploitation of a child’s sexuality by abrogating that child’s human right to dignity, equality, autonomy and physical and mental well-being...CSE reflects a continuum of abuse ranging from child sexual abuse to child sexual exploitation to the commercial exploitation of children.”

Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is defined in the Declaration and Action for Agenda of the World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (1996):

“It comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated as a sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery.”

Article 34 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1997-2003) urges all nations to prevent CSEC. Article 35 also urges nations to DO so.

Media industries – Hecht’s (2001) definition is as follows:

“Media industries are defined as the modes of communication that have an impact on private or public perceptions of the world...The industries that play a prominent role in shaping perceptions pertaining to CSEC include journalism, photography, television, acting, modelling and advertising.”

This definition however, doesn’t include radio broadcasting, popular music, fashion ‘branding’ or accessorising as avenues of social change and sexualisation of children, which they are.

Child erotica – Grant, David and Grabosky (1997) said:

“The narrowest definition would embrace only depictions of children engaged in explicit sexual activity. One could, however, imagine suggestive depictions of children entailing other than sexually explicit behaviour (do the depictions record actual, or imaginary behaviour?). Erotic (but not sexually explicit) depictions of children may appear in art or in commercial advertising.”

Current technology enables computer operators to ‘morph’ images into ‘sexualised’ images by using software. A child’s image can be altered to become pseudo-pornographic without the child’s or parents consent.

Media literacy – ECPAT international (Ending Child Prostitution And Trafficking) definition from 2003:

“Media literacy is the ability to understand and interpret how mass media work, how they produce meanings, how they are organised, and how to use them wisely. The media literate person understands the role media play in his or her life, employs critical thinking to analyse and evaluate the messages of media, and possesses the skills to use media in a deliberate aware manner.”

This definition is specific to an adult level of thinking, and as such, misses considering its application to the developmental ability of children and teenagers.

SOURCES AND BENEFICIARIES

Hecht (2003), of the international organisation ECPAT indicated that the group that benefits most from commercial child sexual exploitation (CSEC) is the private sector, who generates the material and stands to financially benefit from production, marketing, advertising and distribution via commercial or retail means. This activity is contrary to the principles of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), principle 2 and 9 specifically. As Hecht (2003) indicated:

“The private sector is involved in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Whether the exploitation is the result of commission or omission on its part may be subject to debate, however, the private sector's connection to this fundamental violation of children's rights is undeniable. Three sub-sectors within the realm of private enterprise have traditionally been associated with CSEC: travel and tourism industries; media industries; and industries within the field of new technologies. In this context, the private sector has been primarily defined as for-profit industries.

The industries that play a prominent role in shaping perceptions pertaining to CSEC include journalism, photography, television, acting, modelling and advertising... The photography industry also plays a prominent role in child sexual abuse. The most widely acknowledged connection between photography and CSEC is in the modelling industry. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has acknowledged: "The use of teenage girls, some as young as 13, modelling adult fashions may create the impression that thin pre-pubescent bodies are the most sexually desirable". It has been further recognized that "photographs of children in their underwear for mail order catalogues are an easily accessible source of material for paedophiles, and are commonly used as such".

Another group that benefits from CSEC are those with sexual Paraphilias related to children, who exploit children sexually and promote such exploitation contrary to the principles of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), principle 2 and 9. Australian material that backs this latter view of sexualised material involving children being used by paedophiles is found in Petriatis and O'Connor's (1999) research book 'Rockspider'.

Marketing and advertising agencies benefit from CSEC. Corporate businesses have recently discovered that children are a source of potential long-term profit – if they can 'brand' them from an early age. Marketing agencies like Euromonitor International will sell you a marketing package to assist you to best 'target' child consumers for a fee (2003) of \$3,900 USD. 'Age compression' is a marketing strategy in which adult products and attitudes are pushed on younger kids via commercial enterprises and advertising. Examples of this would be the production and promotion of produce for children that promote devotion to a particular car brand 10 years before the child is able to get their licence, let alone be able to afford a car.

Another example is the production of 'brand' name, adult style underwear for little girls (*examples further in the paper*).

Commercial and media industries target children via a plethora of merchandising, marketing and advertising material. From advertisements in children's magazines, to television advertisements, video or film 'product placements,' video and console games, computer software, clothing, footwear and accessory manufacturers, electronic and communications equipment, radio programming, music magazines, newspapers, cosmetic and hair product manufacturers and in music video clips, lyrics and billboards. As Basham (2003) wrote:

"Everywhere audio-visual kids are getting 'messages' about what to buy, what to wear, what products to use, what to eat, drink and how to appear and express themselves as 'sexy' at an increasingly earlier age. This is not surprising; kids media role models are no longer their parents or their peers, no longer similar to their own age, they are music performers, pop superstars, famous athletes, super models, television actors and actresses, most *very sexy* and mostly understood to be *sexually active*. Sex sells, that's the reason children are being marketed to, they are the future of profit and sex."

Viewing Home and Away, The Bold and the Beautiful, Big Brother, or Neighbours during children's viewing time is enough to have this validated.

Journalism's messages are a point of longitudinal research. Ferguson (1985) conducted a content analysis of women's magazines from 1949 to 1980, Ferguson wrote:

"Women's magazines are pervasive in the extent to which they act as agents of socialisation, and the remarkable degree to which they deal in and promulgate values and attitudes...They tell women what to think and do...to this, add the power of advertising...here is a potent formula for steering female attitudes, behaviour and buying along a particular path of femininity...Men's magazines are aimed at particular groups of males and cater for parts of a mans life – his business, hobby or sporting interest, not for the totality of his masculinity, nor his male role as such."

Ferguson identified key themes of the media focussing on women:

- Getting and keeping your man.
- Overcoming misfortune.
- Heart versus head decisions.
- The happy family.
- The working wife is a bad wife.
- Achieving perfection.
- Gilded youth.
- Success equals happiness.

Between 1975 and 1980, the only key theme to change was to – 'a working wife is a good wife.' If longitudinal research was conducted in a similar manner today, I suspect the messages would be the same, other than:

- To be loved - be sexy, thin and beautiful.

- How to have the best sex.
- Fashion and consumerism.

If a grown woman is being bombarded by pervasive media messages that shape her life and identity, what hope does a vulnerable child have to discern such messages? Children's magazines, which have become more prolific since the 1980's, are based upon the adult format and include very powerful messages and advertising which children may not be able to discern as they have limited media literacy. Many teen magazines use sexually provocative images or ideas. A teen magazine¹ told girls how to get 'the bedhead look' for their hairstyle. The same magazine² had a poster of a half naked man in a bed. Again, the magazine³ had a picture of a naked J-Lo selling perfume on the back page, and an adult underwear supplier listed. The demographic of the magazine was 13-17 years – 3 years of which are under the age of consent. More recently, another magazine⁴ printed a photo of a catwalk model without underwear (I have blurred the photo, it was not blurred at print), which was withdrawn from circulation.



The magazines underage girls currently read use sexualised language and terms like 'eye candy', 'torso of the month'⁵ and 'hottie' to describe male celebrities. This is not necessary.

Journalism is problematic. Hecht (2001) stated:

"Journalism offers the most direct forum for CSEC. For example, many youth are confronted with 'sex work' through print commercials and classified advertisements for escorts or modelling agencies recruiting 'innocent' or 'barely legal' teens."

¹ Girlfriend, October 2002, page 45. Pacific Publications.

² Girlfriend. June 2003, p38 and May 2003, p 60-62. Pacific Publications

³ Girlfriend. January 2003, p 140 and December 2002, p34.

⁴ Dolly.

⁵ Girlfriend, February 2006. p162,163 (querying which male they would want to see half naked)

The Office of Film and Literature Classification (1999) has 'guidelines' for 'age limits' regarding media depictions of sexual activity. Such 'descriptions' and depictions of sexual activity are permitted if they involve "consenting adults"...further, the code states explicitly that publications which

"describe or depict in a way that is likely to cause reasonable offence to a reasonable adult, a person who is, or who looks like, a child under 16 (whether that person is engaged in sexual activity or not), will be classified RC (refused classification)."

There are plenty of 'depictions' of suggested sexual activity or innuendo in Australian teen magazines and in television soap operas involving adults acting as teens. Advertisements in newspapers suggest at 'under-age' or 'nearly' illegal sexual services. I suggest that many Australian journalists are not familiar with the guidelines.

The photography industry is culpable in regards to CSEC, especially via the modelling industry. The U.N Commissioner for Human Rights (1999-2003) has acknowledged:

"The use of teenage girls, some as young as 13, modelling adult fashions may create the impression that thin, pre-pubescent bodies are the most sexually desirable."

The difference between photographs marketing child underwear and clothing and child erotica is becoming harder to discern. Photographers get paid to produce pictures for companies that want to sell to children; they also get paid by the print media for pictures that 'sell' an image or a 'label.' It was only this week (April 7th to 13th) that Vogue Australia refused to use a 13 year old overseas model for their magazine, citing she was too young. They need to be commended.

There are a few Australian businesses that 'own' media conglomerates – inclusive of T.V. stations, radio stations, women's men's, kids magazines and newspapers etc. For example – Channel 9 and Channel 7 are both connected to magazines, newspapers, radio stations, children's media and specific shows. This is not necessarily widely known. If the conglomerate does not have uniform, adhered to, codes of conduct for journalists, photographers, editors, presenters, marketing branches, audio-visual producers and other associated divisions, that comply with Australian regulations and codes of conduct and International treaties on the rights of children, then there is in effect, no regulation, no protection for children, and a massive profit shared amongst the conglomerate. This is in-house exploitation of children and profit of a large scale.

Television and film industries have a huge influence on children. The Center for A New American Dream, in their (2002) press release, stated:

"it is estimated that the average child sees more than 20,000 commercials every year. That works out to at least 55 commercials per day...children spend a daily average of 4 hours and 40 minutes in front of a screen of some kind, two and a half hours of which, are watching television."

That is a HUGE influence on a child.

Television and soap operas is a dangerous avenue for the sexualisation of children, who may view with or without parents. Scutt (1990) doesn't advocate censorship for adults, but she does question the context of media messages. The Australian Children's Television Standards (2002) clearly outline unsuitable program or advertising material in the P or C timeslots, but many children watch TV outside of these times and thus, receive sexual messages they may not fully comprehend during soap opera timeslots or even the news. For example, young teens watching RAGE music television late on a Friday evening (they sleep in Saturday) may see sexual content that is unsuited to their developmental age.

Marketers are another source and a beneficiary of CSEC. A commercial rationale for marketing to children by Allen and Duyck-Wolfe (2001) based upon The Fifth Annual National Survey (of 1235 parents of children between the ages of 2 and 17, and 416 child respondents between the ages of 8 and 16) found:

"The children's market is valuable for three reasons:

1. Children make a great deal of purchases themselves.
2. they influence their parents purchases.
3. they will become future consumers."

This attitude is called 'Cradle to Grave' marketing and branding. The Center for a New American Dream (2001), stated:

"Children's spending has roughly doubled every ten years for the past three decades, and has tripled in the 1990's. IN the 1960's, children influenced about \$5 billion of their parents' purchases. By 1984 that figure increased ten-fold to \$50 billion. By 1997 it had tripled to \$188 billion."

The Center also indicated that:

"In 2001 U.S, advertising expenditures topped \$230 billion, more than doubling the \$105.97 billion spent in 1980. Given that the 2000 American census reports 105 million households in America, this means that advertisers spend an average of \$2,190 per year to reach ONE household."

I imagine that Australian 'proportional' spending would be similar. Kids marketing expert James McNeal estimated by the year 2000, children 12 and under influenced family purchases to the tune of \$500 billion USD. Children employ a 'nag' factor to convince some parents of their 'marketed needs.'

Bordo (2002) said,

"Popular culture, I would insist, has a profound influence on teenagers sexuality. That's where they get their ideas about what is attractive, what's feminine, what's masculine, what's cool, what's sexy, what's romantic. And images of sexuality play a large part in that instruction...People no longer learn primarily through verbal instruction in this culture, but through pictures and images, which get directly at fantasy and desire, and feed the hunger for stimulation and excitement."

As indicated, there are a lot of sources of CSEC and a lot of adults from many various industries and locations worldwide who benefit, it is the children who don't.

EVIDENCE OF PREMATURE SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN

Underwear retail sales. Padded bras, g-strings, evidence from advertising and visits to a major retailer.

Jockey Girl's (padded) Daywear Bra

Content 95% Cotton, 5% Lycra Spandex.
PLEASE NOTE: Size XL is only available in
Color White.

Choose a Size: Sml size 6, chest 20-22

Select a Color: GYH 050 Grey heather



Girls underwear is available in g-strings for 6 year olds, along with padded bras for the same age.



Girls of 4–6 and 8-10 rarely have breast tissue that is developing and needs support. Most 12-14 year old girls do, need protection, though is it essential to have carbon-copies of adult lingerie in child sizes?

What's wrong with this picture of a girls underwear section in a large chain department store?

Examine the mannequins – they have *adult* bodies...the underwear in this section was sizes 4-6, 8-10 and 12-14, inclusive of g-strings.



These girls underpants were found by the researcher in a major Australian chain store in 2006. They were available in size 4-6, 8-10 and 12-14 year old sizes. Highly inappropriate words of "lucky lips" on pubic mound.



This picture was taken in Perth in 2006/07, involving a 15 year old model and a 23 year old man. It purports to sell clothing for a youth orientated clothing store.

You can't see the clothes!! What is being sold? The West Australian printed it for comment.

Harm to children involved in the acting and modelling world has been commented on by Hecht (2003) at The Second World Congress:

“concern was voiced about the harm to children caused by acting and modelling realities...(eg) child actors portraying scenes of sexual abuse. Further attention has been placed on the representation of children, or child-like adults, as sexual objects in the modelling industry. The harm to children is three-fold: (via) production...(as) viewers...or use by paedophiles.”

In 2004, the Australian public reacted strongly to the images of an eight-year-old girl¹ from Queensland, the daughter of a fashion photographer. The images appeared to be of a much older person, in more adult dress and make-up. Much public comment was made about whether the child was being exploited. The researcher sourced information freely available off the internet that described the school she attends, the name of her teacher, the awards she has received, the suburb she lives in and was able to download pdf images of her she could ‘morph’ with the basic software she had. If she is able to do this, imagine what a paedophile could do.

Girls in America (2000) website lists some interesting facts:

- “The average model today weighs 23% less than the average American Woman.
- If Barbie were translated into human terms, a 5’ 9” Barbie would be 33” bust, 18” waist and 28” hips (she would have difficulty standing) *unreal*.
- American *girls* take place in over 3,000 beauty pageants every year...pageant magazines are loaded with advertisements for plastic surgery, nose jobs, breast implants, cosmetic dentistry, diet pills and weight loss programs...”

This is *children* they are talking about in the third point. What message are these children getting about their worth in the U.S.? Will they grow up with major self-esteem problems and believe they have to look or act a certain way to be accepted? Is Australia following that lead, is another question.

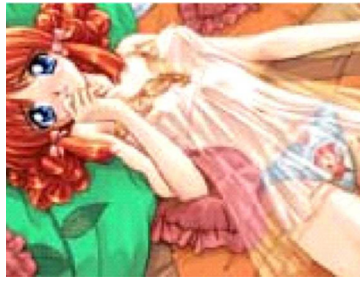
Children’s cartoon characters like ‘Sailor Moon’ seem harmless enough, they are *teenage* schoolgirls with super-powers, wearing very short shirts and having big breasts. Pornographic versions with the same characters are available in Australian video-stores (on the shelves covers are visible) and online via the Internet. In the Documentary “The Perfect Fake”², shown on SBS, it is evident that sex dolls are also available of the same characters, exported from Japan. Is this ‘cradle to the grave’ marketing? In this documentary, sex dolls are available that look like pre-pubescent children. The use of these sex dolls is representative of sexual activity with *children*. The law may not have caught up with this phenomenon of *pseudo- child pornography*, especially in regards to digitally altered images using child ‘parts.’

¹ New Idea, August 23rd 2003. ‘Too much, too soon.’

² ‘The Perfect Fake.’ Shown on SBS 2007.



A Japanese sex doll



A teen character from Anime

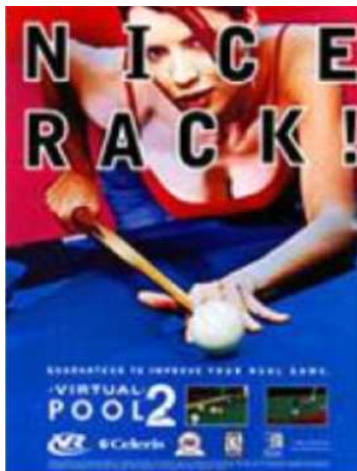


Sailor Moon ad'

Console games and the marketing of console games is another area of CSEC. Although some games have recommended ages for use, the policing of compliance with this is very difficult.



'Wanted - Dead or Alive.' X-box. This console game allows the gamer to choose the breast size, body measurements and age of the character. All characters are female, 17-26 and wear only a bikini. One male runs the island and the girls have to negotiate with him for 'gifts' or rewards after playing volleyball or performing tasks.



What is being advertised? This game is not rated M



There have also been discussions amongst parents, Educators and the media about the suitability of 'Bratz' dolls. Some models are available in g-strings, with adult style lingerie and almost 'bondage-type' outfits. Some may argue that 'Barbie' has been replaced by a sassy, sexy child. Barbie was bad enough.

Children's toys are progressively becoming more 'adult' in theme, dress or use. For example, The British department store 'Tesco' received numerous complaints about the 'Peekaboo pole-dancing kit' for children available via their toy department online in 2007.

The 'Peekaboo Pole-dancing kit' included a furry g-string, the sectioned pole and an instructional video that promised to "bring out the sex-kitten" in the user. 'Tesco' indicated that the kit was used for legitimate exercise purposes...in a g-string on a child?



Child and Youth Clothing and 'branding' – look *like* Britney, like The Olsen Twins, Bad Boy, the latest 'brand' appealing to children and youth.



An advertisement by a clothing company that targets youth. Is being a 'Barbie doll' the ideal?



This company manufactures clothes for children – the visual is very powerful and overtly 'lit' to be sexual – focussing on the undressing woman's genital area.



This 11 year old girl – before and after a modelling shoot for a calendar.

In Canada, the U.K. and some areas of the U.S., children cannot model underwear in catalogues or in online catalogues. This minimises the risk that online, or offline images of children will be put in paedophiles collections.

Even the legal fraternity appear to be out of touch with the danger of CSEC or child sexual abuse. Kellet (2007) reported how a Brisbane solicitor tried to use a defence of “artistic appeal” to explain his 500,000 images of mainly imported, child porn images. The solicitor showed intent to exploit children by travelling to foreign nations to obtain such porn. The solicitor tried to use a psychological diagnosis involving ‘compulsive collecting’ to minimise his actions. A solicitor that upholds the law that he has repeatedly broken, especially in regards to child protection should not be practicing – he has a ‘bias’ to illegal activity and behaviour. As Kellet reported:

"They are in effect crime scene photographs," *the Crown prosecutor* said.

"Those tens of thousands of children in those images would each have their own stories of trauma ... whose abuse, both physical and sexual, has been documented."

"*The judge commented*, 'Those who deal in child pornography create the market for the exploitation of children in which they are inevitably harmed.'"

A comment that the sentencing Judge made that the offender was “not considered a direct risk to children” upon release is incredible, the offender has already damaged indirectly every child whose image he has used for his sexual gratification and promoted international exploitation and profit for those in the business. Just look at the common sentences handed down to child sex offenders and paedophiles, and the lack of mandatory, long-term ‘release’ supervision for offenders. Proving CSEC or child sexual abuse in a criminal court is difficult enough, but the average sentence is less than 3 years with probation. Rob a bank and get 15 years. There is something wrong with a nation when the vulnerable of society are not protected by law and offenders severely punished – there needs to be a deterrent. The way the courts handle sexual abuse cases, the level of evidence and the often delay by a child in disclosing due to other issues, means that offenders in the main, get away with it.

Those who work with sex offenders know that recidivism is a common factor, those who work with addictions, inclusive of addictions of a sexual nature, know that relapse is also common. Whether we call CSEC an addiction or a type of sexual offending, recidivism is high, especially with addictions. See Perkins, Hammond, Coles & Bishopp (1998), Becker (1994), The Findings of the Home Office on Sexual Offenders (2003) and Chung, O’Leary & Hand (2006).

EFFECTS & RESEARCH

Early sexual activity. Peterson and Kahn's (1984) study of 326 teenagers found that:

"...a preference for music television had increased amounts of sexual experience in their mid-teen years."

The Secondary students and Sexual Health Study at La Trobe University (2002), found:

"The majority of young people between the ages of 14-17 are sexually active in some way and this has increased over the last decade. Types of sexual activity reported included:

- Deep kissing (80%)
- Genital touching or being touched (67%)
- Giving and/or receiving oral sex (45.5%)
- Vaginal intercourse was reported by 25% of young people age 14 and just over half of those aged 16."

The same University in their 3rd National Survey of Secondary Students And Sexual Health (2003), that:

"the majority of people in years 10-12 (14-17 years old) are sexually active and this has increased over the last decade...just over a quarter (25.9%) reported they had unwanted sex...22.7% indicated they were drunk or high at the time."

It is interesting that these studies indicate an increase of sexual activity in a decade since CSEC has been more prevalent in multi-media and marketing, with little regulation or consideration for the effects on children as they grow.

Mission Australia has an annual study of youth; these studies need to be considered in light of premature sexualisation as 'links' to CSEC could be found. The West Australian Aids Council (2002) identified:

"27.1% of all 15-19 year olds in W.A. have gonorrhoea, 29.2% have Chlamydia and some have hepatitis too."

Though these aren't current statistics, they indicate a trend that has already occurred in the U.K. The British Medical Journal (2003) identified that one in ten sexually active young women in England is infected with Chlamydia and that between 1996 and 2001 gonorrhoea nearly doubled and the number of syphilis cases rose by 500%. The U.K has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe. Australia has the 6th highest in the developed world. Early sexualisation and engagement in early (perhaps illegal) sexual activity is a public health risk that can cause infertility. Australia has need of steady population growth, not decline if we are to have future tax-payers and a healthy future economy.

The sexualisation of children was indicated in the 1980's when videos had just begun to have more sexualised imagery, dance became highly suggestive and sexual and this trend has continued. Watching Rage or Video-hits is enough to assist a person to realise much of the visual content simulates overt sexual behaviours. The viewing times are often times when children under the age of consent can watch. There appears to be no regulation of the content of music videos. We have generations of children emulating Eminem, Britney Spears, The Pussycat Dolls and other ADULT performers in dress, language and 'sexiness.'



Ashley Simpson



Pussycat Dolls



Christina Aguilera



Eminem



Britney Spears

All of these photographs are freely available on the Internet at sites that child fans visit. They promote a certain 'identity' that children emulate and read about in their 'tween' magazines.

Similarly, Brown and Newcomer (1991) conducted a study linking sexualised media and early sexual activity involving 391 junior high students (those 12-15 years old), finding:

“that those who selectively viewed more sexual content on television were more likely to have begun having sexual intercourse in the preceding year.”

We currently do not have the ability to study the effects of CSEC on children exposed via the Internet – The Internet is not regulated enough to measure or test this due to the amount of online games, interactive games, sites specific to children, forums, advertising 'pop-ups' and the like. Researchers would have the ethical issue of getting data from children and youth. That doesn't mean that it shouldn't occur, the results would most likely be shocking – children and the Internet are a key risk area for viewing or being exposed to CSEC, online sex-offenders and coerced, or direct peer sexualisation.

Australian research on sex offenders was conducted by Petraitis and O'Connor (1999) and published as the book 'Rockspider.' In the book, cases describe paedophiles 'scrapbooking' visuals of children in underwear from shopping catalogues along with pornographic material involving children. Child erotica and advertising artwork and children's underwear was considered to be part of feeding a sex offenders paraphilia. The children identified as most at risk of abuse were in the 10-12 year old age bracket, with 12-14 year olds the next group at risk. In extrafamilial cases male children were at higher risk due to pornography being used to 'groom' the child. This is not often indicated by the media, which focuses on the risk to female children.

The incidence of eating disorders in pre-pubescent and pubescent girls is on the increase as they try to emulate their idols and have 'control' over their distorted body image at earlier ages. Dittrich (1996-2003) reported on the effect of media on the developing "Thin Ideal." She detailed how the media was a major influential factor for children and youth in adopting this ideal. Reinhold (1991) wrote about how the child's sense of their own image, or identity forms over time – this may explained by Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory or Bowlby's (1988) Attachment Theory. Social Learning Theory proposes that the Environment a child grows up in and the influences they have will 'shape' their identity. Attachment theory proposes that early attachments and attachments over time, form our sense of worth and ability to relate to others. Either way, the child is 'shaped' by others and who and what they are exposed to.

The long-term effects on the mental health of children involved in CSEC has not been studied. We do however; know that the incidence of childhood and adolescent depression is on the rise. The Mission Australia (2003) Youth Survey indicated that 52.6% of respondents are concerned about depression and suicide, and 39% about sexual abuse or sexual assault. All is not well with our youth. If the World Health Organisation says Depression will be the most common worldwide illness by 2020, does long-term assault on the sense of worth of a child via CSEC have a part to play in this?

The long-term effects of CSEC on the future parenting of involved children has not been considered. Basham's (2007) research into the effect upon parenting of being a victim of child sexual abuse, indicated the 'ripple-effect' is large. There is no reason to disconnect premature sexualisation from other forms of child abuse in longitudinal effects. No current research has touched on the effect on the next generation of CSEC.

In marketing slang, "KGOY" (kids getting older younger) is an excuse used by marketers and some corporations to minimise any risk of harm to children by specifically targeting them with marketing propaganda to sell a product or 'brand'. Industries that are not regulated will continue to use this excuse. This is one of the main effects of CSEC – kids *seem* to be getting older, younger. But is it because we don't protect them from CSEC?

EDUCATION

Media education is vital tool for children as they grow. Education and appropriate information for children is a *right* expounded in The Convention on the Rights of the Child as listed by ECPAT (2003):

“The Convention on the Rights of the Child recalls the basic principles on the United Nations and affirms that children, because of their vulnerability, require special care and protection. It emphasizes that children have the right to freedom of expression including the freedom “to seek, receive and impart information of all kinds” (Article 13), to protection from unlawful or arbitrary interference in their privacy (Article 16) and to protection from all forms of mental and physical violence, injury, abuse and other damaging influences (Article 19). The CRC encourages the mass media to provide access to and disseminate information of social and cultural value that children may benefit and develop under positive influences (Article 17).

Article 16 of the CRC states that “[n]o child shall be subject to arbitrary and unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour or reputation.” A succinct definition of privacy is difficult to determine; what constitutes a violation of privacy must be judged on a case-by-case basis. For example, it may be in a child’s best interest to have his/her identity publicly disclosed and personal information given to viewers if the child is terminally ill and the purpose of the programme is to get donors for an operation. However, it is not in a child’s best interests to have his/her identity publicly disclosed if he/she is a victim of rape by a family member. In some cases, the freedom of speech may have limitations, within law, or where the best interests of the child are paramount.

ECPAT in (2003) also described the importance of media literacy skills:

“Media literacy is the ability to understand and interpret how mass media work, how they produce meanings, how they are organized, and how to use them wisely. The media literate person understands the role media play in his or her life, employs critical thinking to analyse and evaluate the messages of media, and possesses the skills to use media in a deliberate aware manner. The dangers of not thinking about media are greatest among young children, who are among the heaviest yet least sophisticated viewers. By helping young people develop media literacy skills that will allow them to analyze critically what they see and read, we help them to develop independent visions of themselves, free from the controlling influences of individuals and organisation remote from them and from us, and whose values and visions we may not share.”

In the context of CSEC, the portrayal of children in media continues to be an issue. Appropriate, comprehensive sexuality AND relationship education, inclusive of teaching about ‘rights’ for children and youth, is essential to assist children as they grow so they have tools to deal with CSEC that cannot be regulated, or will not be regulated. Part of currently available ‘Protective Behaviours’ programs could be expanded to deal with Media Literacy if the Primary and Secondary Education Authorities do not do so. This should be compulsory.

STRATEGIES TO REGULATE THE MEDIA

The AANA code for advertising to children (my abridged version in italics) stipulates:

•Advertisements to children must be unambiguous, not portray distressing images, nor demean any person...gender, age, race, religion, mental or physical disability or sexual preference. Ad's must not depict unsafe use or encourage children into dangerous activities... A specific advertisement in a girls teen magazine¹ that breached this code was for a brand of shoes. The advertisement had what appeared to be a naked boy under a girl's bed, whilst all you saw of her was her feet coyly positioned in front of the bed – the demographic for this magazine was 12-17 years of age. Mostly under the age of consent - dangerous and illegal activity was suggested.

•Must not imply that persons who purchase are superior to their peers... What this code does **not** include is guidelines for the protection of children used in media that advertises to children – in many cases, the code would be broken in terms of suggesting to a child viewing that if they had this toy, or wore those clothes, or had this music, or that technology, that they would be in some way superior to their peers. The child who participated in the media may have more access to obtaining the object that made them in some way superior to their peers.

•Children in advertisements must not be presented in a manner that may be misunderstood by other children... The example of the shoes advertisement mentioned above broke this code also.

•Produce must not create a false or misleading impression to children... This is the point that could be explored the most – much of the CSEC in the media is defended with statements that minimise the potential damage. What impression regarding a product or the possession of a product is put forward to a child? Does wearing a 'Bad Boy' shirt mean that a woman is likely to undress in front of the male child? Does wearing a 'brand' name item of clothing make a child potentially famous or better looking?

The KGOY excuse is often used by marketers or advertisers to continue suing a particular campaign targeting children. Others use the 'blame-shift' or 'disclaimer' approach, that it is 'in all ways, at all times, the parent's responsibility' to monitor and protect their children. With working parents at a high level, blended and step, single parent and other family types increasing – how can families make constant rules that are applicable in all households a child visits? Each commercial entity that stands to profit from CSEC has a Civil Law 'Duty of Care' to not harm or cause damage to anybody involved in their activities, or the recipient of their activities. It is not always the sole responsibility of parents.

¹ Girlfriend, July 2001. p 124. Pacific Publications.

Suggestions:

A commercial (brand) and retail (store) code of practice regarding the use of children and/or commercially targeting children needs to be developed that is based upon International standards and codes, that is a mandatory requirement of business registration.

Imports of consoles and games need to be monitored more closely so that advertising material that is 'sexually loaded,' like the console game Virtual Pool (previously noted), is not used to market and promote the game in a false manner. Either that, or the 'rating' could be changed to include all the ancillary material, not just the game.

Magazines producers need a code of practice specific to the demographic that they are targeting so that they do not 'bracket-creep' sexualised content that is developmentally inappropriate to the target audience using the KGOY excuse. Similarly, a modelling code of practice regarding the use of children and the kinds of developmentally appropriate images, clothes, etc., is required.

A commercial and retail code of practice for the use of children in the media: Inclusive of regulating bodies and governing boards having training in developmental psychology so that the 'rating' decisions they make are based upon research and science, not upon their own moral or ideological values and agree with international declarations on human and child rights.

T.V. stations having prior warnings for shows involving sexualised music video clips, which can be shown at times that children under the 'M' age are unlikely to be viewing. Plus warnings to parents as part of Community Service announcements that inform parents to monitor children's viewing of soap operas due to the potentially developmentally inappropriate material.

Journalists complying with standards for reporting matters related to children. ECPAT in (2003) reported that:

"In January 2002, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) published a handbook entitled 'Putting Children in the Right: Guidelines for Journalists and Media Professionals'. While many media professionals subscribe to codes of conduct produced by varying professional or industrial groups to which they belong, they may not have a firm grasp of the principles behind the codes. The handbook is useful for media to help guide their activities in the best interests of the child and help them to recognize the special vulnerabilities that children possess, which are often the reasons for the exploitation they suffer in the first place. The IFJ continues to provide training workshops for journalists around the world."

What has happened to these 'Guidelines' for Journalists? Do Australian Journalists comply or use these guidelines? It appears not.

A central agency for regulating the media, as initially suggested by Rush and La Nueze (2006), but not expanded upon, is a high priority. Persons working at this agency will need a spread of expertise in child development and psychology, sexology, criminology, education, law, broadcasting, marketing,

research, etc., so they can advise the Senate and bodies involved in multi-media. A central agency would also be better able to list and distribute information about the Australian and International standards for preventing CSEC. Monitoring would be part of the role of this agency, with random 'audits' conducted. Such an approach could only lift the standard of media targeting children and offer them an opportunity to be more creative without including sexual content.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Lew (1990), when addressing *college* undergraduates in a course on understanding sex roles and sexuality did not underestimate the power of cultural brainwashing via 'the message' in media. The assignments involved reading magazines, watching television and focussing on the content and overt or covert sexual or sex role messages. He summarised:

"Advertising media: billboards, radio, newspapers, direct mail, etc....

But these messages are not limited to the advertising industry. They abound in the content of films, literature, textbooks, theatre, song lyrics, music videos, fashion, and children's toys, games and stories.

Everywhere we turn we are learning about what we 'should' do to be acceptably male and female."

If college undergraduate struggled to discern the messages, what hope does a child have? We not only learn what is acceptably male or female, but what makes a person socially acceptable – having power, money, a role, physical prowess, gender (male) and being very sexy and young. The Australian media are age, size, culture and disability phobic. You will not generally see the 'real' Australian woman (size 14-16) in the media. You will not see the media focus on positive ageing or develop media material positively focussing on Australia's ageing population. You will not generally see disabled models or positive stories on disability; you will not see many Aboriginal, Migrant or culturally diverse Australians in the media. The Australian media is discriminatory by choice – it focuses on the young who are vulnerable enough not to always discern the message. Media 'hooks-in' young people to a consumer lifestyle, where a person's worth is determined by the media, not the person, or their beliefs, culture and values. Those who produce the goods and marketing benefit the most.

Mertz and Lonsway (1998) wrote about societal denial of child sexual abuse. They concluded that the way that denial works in a society influences every level of that society, through to the legal professions, Government, media and social welfare agencies. Offenders are able to convince such bodies that the abuse never really occurred the way it has been disclosed or recorded. They deny on two levels – individually and culturally/institutionally. The voices of the victims are silenced, with claims from alleged offenders that:

- **Attack the source** of complaint as – non-credible, crazy, delusional, hysterical, weak, confused, mistaken, 'mad,' or vengeful.
- **Re-frame the offence** by minimising damage, using excuses that involve causality and false science, distract with "yes, but"... "there are

other factors,” and using psychological talk and guilt trips like “it’s bad to blame,” or using moral values that promote situational ethics.

- **Use language games** to do all of the above and avoid responsibility. Intellectualising, verballing and circular arguments.
- **Changing the narrative** – by a combination of all of the above, so that the story is nicely rationalised and the victim’s story loses impact.
- **Outright denial** – of any responsibility.

Denial can sound plausible in legal gobbledegook. It is still denial.

It is interesting that although the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child was written in 1959, and early social researchers like Sereny (1984) wrote about the sexual exploitation of children. Commercial, retail, marketing, advertising and multi-media businesses appear to ‘dodge’ the internationally agreed standard of ethical and legal responsibility they have to protect children from exploitation. As Phillip Adams (2003) said:

“There’s no age of consent when it comes to turning kids into consumers or trying to sexualise them.”

Money speaks louder than children.

This paper has been sent in a draft form due to the time limitation to have it submitted. Please excuse grammatical or other errors.

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