

18th April, 2008

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission by Parents for a Real Choice - Inquiry into the Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media environment

We are a newly formed group of Australian parents, who are tired of our rights to be the primary care giver of our children, being eroded by the financial, government and society pressures being placed upon us and our children.

Many of us have chosen to make the necessary sacrifices to have one parent at home as the care giver of our children, hence most are single-income families living in all parts of Australia with all kinds of occupations.

We are tired of having to censor the environment that our children are faced with, be that the television, print media, internet or public spaces that are being polluted by the sexual content that is violating the rights of our children to live as children, free of corruption of their innocence in a sexually perverse way. Many of us are still nursing or expecting new babies into our families so we have not had the time to give this committee all of the examples of sexually explicit material available in the public domain that we do not want our children exposed to.

Sources of overtly sexualized material & effects on our children

Advertising

Advertisements are materials in the public domain used to increase sales or products, services, activities or attendance at functions. As parents we are angry at the oversexualized advertisements that our children, under the age of 18 years are being bombarded with. Listed below are these sources of materials we believe our children are being exposed to.

- **Billboards** that line our road ways are not able to be turned off. Our children who are learning to read, practice reading all the signs along the road as we drive from point a to b. When we pass signs that read "Longer Last Sex" in red writing on a yellow background, I fear that one day soon we will have to explain the meaning of these words to our children that is aimed at adult men with sexual problems.
- **Buses** display advertisements with scantily clad women notably the ad for dove beauty products with a woman removing her shirt. Children who are passing these buses while riding in cars, walking along the street or waiting to catch the bus will not understand the truly sexual nature of this material.
- **Advertisements in the National newspapers** including the Sydney Morning Herald, Australian or Courier Mail – Our children use these as sources

of material for school projects or for general educational purposes. We are not sure what images or ideas are being absorbed into their innocent minds. One advertisement for jewellery stores in the Strand Arcade in Sydney's CBD, depicted two women with one holding a large gold chain in a pose that looked like she was about to choke the other women. It looked like a lesbian fight about to happen.

- **"Junk Mail" Regular sales brochures for department stores arriving in the suburban letterboxes** that depict underwear for young children down to 3 years including underpants with unsavoury words that make them sexual targets, bra style crop tops manufactured by the Bonds company for 3 year old children who are a long way off puberty who have no idea how men see these as part of the sexual attraction process; shirts, dresses that depict over emphasized breast shaping for children that will not develop these until at least 10 years of age; tightly fitted pants that accentuate the girl's bottoms. We have often exchanged the dresses that were gifts from Pumpkin Patch Children's clothing store for more feminine styles. Others have binned the underpants that depicted the bratz images bought by an aunty for a child who was attracted by the colour and packaging but had no idea of what these images portrayed. Oversexualized dolls such as the Bratz and oversexualized Barbie material that has been merchandised well beyond the basic doll but into images on underwear, pajamas, Easter eggs, cups, bags, colouring books, hats, shirts or anything that young children will desire that gives the child the idea that the women like Paris Hilton who are models for these dolls are the normal way to behave as a woman. Cowboy Barbie doll, another gift from an aunt who grew up with the innocent Barbie 25 years ago was sent to landfill. Her knee high boots and tight fitting shirts send the wrong sexual messages to a 3 year old girl who innocently wants to play with dolls.
- **Free suburban newspapers/ magazines** regularly advertising fat reducing services that leads to our girls thinking if they are not think like the emancipated models they are unattractive, resulting in eating disorders; pages of classified ads for prostitute services under the guise of call girls giving our daughters the idea that this is a viable career choice that generates a great supplementary income to fund tertiary studies or boys who merely see women as readily available sexual objects; beauty treatments to make you look brown and beautiful that make our girls think that the emancipated, thin tanned women is the epitome of beauty. Northside Courier 26.03.2008, free to the North Shore residents has ads "slim body for life!, The Natural Way Natural Weight Loss Health Care Clinics." Any woman who has carried a baby knows this a joke, sending the wrong message to our young girls. Other ads depict adolescent girls advertising "The Ashbrooke Cosmetic Surgery, The body sculpting Specialists, Doctor Injectors Only". A scantily clad perfectly formed body of an adolescent model in a bra and briefs would make all girls think you have to be beautiful and these doctors will give you the perfect body. What message are we sending our female children as they flick through the pages of the local paper? Where are the images of the real women with large hips and fat thighs?
- **Internet** unwanted advertisements are spammed across the internet providers sites especially on free websites like hotmail or they just pop up on sites that have no relation to the material being viewed on a website. Typing the words pink and kit, that relates to a kit that women can view to get tips on delivering a baby naturally resulted in many unwanted porn site links. Although children will not be looking for this material, they might use the words pink, kit and kite to look up pink kites. We dare not look for fear of what other porn links will be presented.
- **Television advertising** – One advertisement for Nandos Chicken depicted a pole dancing mother of 3 who danced to raise money to buy chicken for her

family's dinner, what mother in her right mind would be so desperate for a chicken dinner? What message are we sending to young children about the value of their mother? Increased advertisements with women scantily clad in lingerie that are aired during g rated sporting events that are being viewed by young boys during the national cricket matches, one day games or Friday night football that parents have let their 12 year old children to stay up to watch. How will boys form a respectable view of women other than seeing them as sexual objects at their disposal or bringing arousing images into a developing mind.

- **Radio Advertising** – Regular advertisements for longer lasting sex and sexual problems on FM stations are infiltrating the innocence of our children as we listen to these channels whilst driving in our cities or on the highway from city to town.

Media Content

- **Television**
 - o **News stories** – Graphic details of sexual crimes including rape, incest, pedophiles, prostitution; Collette Dinigan's lingerie collection was paraded on the 6.00pm news as an item of importance but who is watching, young children, men who will think this is normal, girls and who knows.
 - o **Programmes** – Children as young as 7 years of age watching unsupervised programmes like "Home and Away" featuring stories of sexually permissive school-aged actors portraying stories of teenage pregnancies, random sexual activity giving them the idea this behavior is acceptable leading to increased teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and physiological damage. If these were real life stories, they would be breaking the law to have sex with a minor under the age of 16 years. Violence in programmes that are portrayed as normal behaviour. Neighbours in Tasmania as young as 8 years old told us that "Home and Away" was their favourite programme. Young high school children are being asked to watch these programmes as part of the English curriculum to critique these shows as part of a section on popular culture. This sends the wrong messages to our young adolescent children with forming minds. The parents are not taking responsibility to supervise the television viewing of these programmes.
- **Radio**
 - o **News Stories** – Graphic news items giving details of the sexual crimes including the former NSW Aboriginal Minister Milton Orkopaoulos's sex crimes. This will create confusion in the minds of our young children, even sexually disturbing images.
 - o **General programmes** – the afternoon show on the ABC radio hosted by Richard Glover follows most stories with a sexual content that have been featured in the national print/ internet news media; parents are playing these programmes as they transport children from extra curricula programmes to home which will infiltrate the child's innocent mind without the parent being aware. Do we really care about the intimate sexual activity of men and women? This is content that needs to be kept behind the bedroom doors of consenting adults who are in a committed married relationship that can handle the consequences of the relationship.

- **Internet**

- o **Uncensored websites** – unfiltered internet content that is viewed by children unbeknown to parents who will have to answer questions about sexual content or even have to pay for physiological counseling for children who have been corrupted by child sexual predators who masquerade as children luring the young ones into their confidence, who end up doing harm to the minds of these little ones.
- o **Chat rooms** where sexual predators lurk posing as an innocent friend of the child; that can suddenly pop up when two innocent words are put into a search engine for a school project or general interest material or cleverly planted under innocent words to lure in the innocent child.
- o **News Services** – “English hotel to offer sex toy minibar”, 18/03/2008 was featured in the ABC news website as a story. How can we trust our children to freely avail themselves of this service to search or read the news of the day?

Another story “Twigley shakes her thing”, 14/04/08, featured on Perth Now powered by Sunday Times, features the modelling antics of an AFL associated woman, Rebecca Twigley ends with, “Sadly for male fans, Twigley and Myer girl **Jennifer Hawkins** will be keeping their clothes on for the Sydney party on May 14.”

- **Tabloid Magazines**

- o **Women’s Magazines** feature stories of emancipated models or Hollywood actresses who have the perfect body achieved through ruthless starvation diets, surgery to change the shape of breast size, face lifts or nose surgery that sends the message to young children that you must be like this to be accepted in society, lead to eating disorders, psychological breakdown in their mental ability to deal with their situation in life. Nicole Ritchie of the Ritchie & Paris Hilton fame was featured as a thin emancipated woman, who then featured as a young pregnant mother. Why are these women hero worshipped as good role models to our young children? This will create a sexual awakening in them that is going to lead to numerous problems.
- o **Adolescent Magazines** like Girlfriend Magazine, Dolly, and Cosmopolitan are just two of many who feature sexually promiscuous stories awaking young girl’s sexuality before they are mentally able to be responsible for their actions or have a morally formed conscience only to be deeply hurt leading to an increase in teenage pregnancy, sexual diseases and mental breakdown. Early this year, Girlfriend magazine featured a story on masturbation for girls as young as 9 years of age in a sealed section. They told them it was not a sin and quite normal. If this isn’t causing sexual awakening or over sexualizing our children we are beginning to lose a sense of reality.
- o **Men’s Pornographic Magazines**, Ralph, Zoo and others are available alongside the general viewing magazines in newsagents, service stations and supermarkets where we go to buy food or petrol not pornographic material. It is common to see young men perusing these magazines. Again we are making women into demeaning objects of desire for men who will have confused sexual ideas. It is little wonder that parents want to guard their little girls from sexual predators. Unfortunately for those of us who live in big cities where our children

catch the train to school or elsewhere, we have no idea who is waiting on the platform for our children.

Merchandise

- **Clothing-** While it has always been the primary care-giver's responsibility to set boundaries for our children, now we are forced to censor all the clothing that is sent to us from relatives and friends. Designers, shops (see section Advertising Junk Mail) and anyone that sells children's clothing predominately girls clothing are pushing these girls into tight fitting, skimpy tight fitting shirts, skirts and pants that portray our children as sexual targets. What male doesn't look at a girl with accentuated breasts and get excited? Why are Bonds and other brands making crop top style bras for 3 year old girls to wear? Why do Pumpkin Patch dresses, as one example, have accentuated breast areas on the dresses when these girls only know breasts as a milk source for new born babies? Pajamas feature images of the oversexualized bratz dolls. This limits our choice as parents.

-**Toys** – Oversexualized dolls, notably barbie and her new competing dolls, bratz dolls are awakening our children to a new sexual style of dressing.

-**Associated materials** – Anything from cups, stationary, colouring books, bags containing food and the like are being placed on the shelves in our department stores at the eye level our children. It becomes very difficult for parents, relatives and friends of the children to say no to this merchandise when we may be shopping for ordinary items. It is so hard to weather the tantrum that children perform when they are told no. Relatives and friends will give in. As parents we do not have much choice but to protect our children by weathering the storm. I watched a lady buy Easter Eggs featuring bratz images most likely for her young daughter. These are created to celebrate the Easter Christian festival. We are so far removed from the purpose of this merchandise but corporations are now preying upon our most precious children by labeling these items with oversexualized images. A carry bag, tin, featuring images of bratz dolls that contained a bag of marshmallows was sent to landfill after an aunt returned home from a visit.

Parental control of oversexualized material

All these sources of sexualizing material are destroying the innocence of the future generation of Australian children. As parents we are tired of having to vet everything our children watch, listen to, wear or what we or friends buy for them.

We can turn the television off with the flick of a switch. That eliminates the violent, oversexualized television programmes or advertisements that awaken our children's sexuality before they are able to mentally cope. Our radios are replaced with CDs or music or audio books suitable for the developing minds of children. However the ABC has stopped producing audio books, yet again robbing our children of innocent material. I have to stop viewing the tabloid women's magazines. We stopped buying the National papers and subscribe to cooking magazines or other reading material instead. We bin the local papers and junk mail that arrives in our letterbox before the children have had a chance to see it. That means being vigilant not to leave this material or the odd National paper lying around the house for general viewing.

We vet all packages received from relatives and friends. Often we remove images of bratz material rendering it to landfill. Yesterday we sent a guideline to our children's

relatives on what oversexualized material not to send to their nieces. Barbie is being left on the shop shelves. How sad, as parents that we have to tell our relatives to not bother buying the oversexualized cloths but to put money in the bank instead. It is a win situation for all involved.

However, we cannot switch off the billboards on the roadside or change the material on buses or trains. We cannot stop young boys and men from perusing pornographic material in newsagents, service stations or supermarkets. We do not control the oversexualized clothing and merchandise being pushed upon our young children. Short of locking the children up and throwing away the key, what do we do? We can go to the supermarket alone to buy food or shops to buy children's clothing and we can risk leaving them in a locked car while we pay for the petrol but I am sure no parent wants to put precious child at risk of being kidnapped or stolen in the car.

Monitoring whose house the children visit is another tedious chore for parents. We don't know what oversexualized material is available in relatives' or friends' homes. So the children often stay home or say no to the parties. What choice do the perpetrators of this material leave us as concerned parents? Fortunately we have found other concerned parents whom our children can grow up with in the knowledge that the friend's parents' share our concern for protecting the innocence of our children.

Strategies to prevent and/or reduce the sexualisation of children

Recommendations

1. Advertising

Self regulator advertising is failing our children. While you have members of this the Advertising Standards board who lobby for the X rated pornographic sex industry to have this rating changed to an R rating, we as parents are being failed. We are tired, we don't have time to play the censor ship board for everything our children are exposed. We must have zero tolerance of sexually explicit material in our public spaces, including all public modes of transport, billboards, publicly displayed banners or anything that impinges on a violation of the public space used by children or would be classed as public space.

Legislate for a re-regulated ASB Code of Practice and regulated board

Government needs to legislate for a regulated Advertising Standards Code and Board who must vet advertising according to set of guidelines that protects children from oversexualized material. Appoint a child specific arm of the ASB to cover all advertisements and the rights of the child to be protected from sexually provocative material available in the public domain.

Guide lines of ASB children's regulated code of practice must cover

Standard of dress, level of language including of sexually explicit language, swearing, underlying sexual themes, sexually provocative actions, billboards containing any material of any sexual nature must be banned, use of children under the age of 18 years to sell products of: a sexual nature, clothing or magazines with sexual themes.

New ASB Complaints Authority

Improve the turn around time to be no longer than four weeks to give a ruling on advertising complaints received. Make the members of this board answerable for substandard recommendations. Appoint new child specific psychologists or psychiatrist, full time unpaid parents and child experts to the ASB. Remove members of this committee if they are lobbying for any specific body or authority to increase the availability of sexually explicit material in the public domain.

2. Sexually explicit Magazines

Cover all pornographic magazines in translucent covers that have a warning written in red written across the front of the magazine warning that this material contains images that will be offensive to children under the age of 18 years. We have warnings on cigarettes, why do we risk our children with sexual images?

Remove sexually explicit magazines from sale in supermarkets and services stations. They need to be put at the back of the newsagent out of the view of children at eyelevel. Newsagents need the right to veto the sale of these items, without being penalized by the industry body for refusing point of sale of pornographic material.

3. Government authority to regulate marketing and sales of sexually explicit material

Zero tolerance of sexually explicit material

We have zero tolerance of toys that harm children or drugs like tobacco. We need a federal government authority that controls the standard of all merchandise for sale in shops that will cause sexualization of our young children. For example, remove bra style underwear for children under the age of 10 years with a penalty for any manufacturer or retailer who breaches the guidelines by attempting to sell items of a sexual nature for and to a child, be that clothing or other merchandise.

This government body would have a set of guild lines that will remove sexually explicit underwear for children under the age of 18, oversexualized dolls or these images on any merchandise that is demonstrated to exploit our children for example, Easter eggs, stationary items, colouring books or any merchandise that can be demonstrated to sexually corrupt our children.

There is a huge amount of material that needs to be addressed in so many areas that the children are exposed to.

4. Regulation of Internet Content

Compulsory filtering by the government of all sexually explicit material that can harm children in any way be that in pop up advertisements or websites that can destroy our children's innocence.

5. Radio and Television Content

Review the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice and the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice It must contain guidelines for protection

of our children from the use of foul language or the airing of sexual themed material on programmes that are aired during a g-rated time slot. Adult themed material would be limited to be aired from 9.30pm till 5.00am, 7 days per week. Even the adult content needs to be censored to meet an R rating and not an X rating.

We need a transparent complaints authority that will be able to penalize any station, be that radio, television or internet provider, government or privately run, who breaches a revised code of conduct for protecting our children from sexually explicit or themed material.

The code must cover, use of language, sexually explicit themes, stories that promote underage pregnancy or early sexual activity in a child under the age of 18 years who are not mentally developed to cope with the consequences of these activities.

6. Role of Sex Education and Human Development in Schools

My high school sex education and human development lessons were cancelled after they became too explicit. Most of us only learnt about every form of contraception both in junior high and senior school. Since leaving school we have had to undo the damage caused by the lack of the truth about sex. Everyone knows the stories of hurt from abortion, rape and other sexual activity. The body is designed to bond with another human being, through the uniting actions of the hormones that the brain releases when we engage in sexual relations with a human person of the opposite sex. That is why it is so difficult to break up when sexual relations have been engaged in. We recommend that all school based education contains as follows

a. Abstinence Sex education in our schools must not teach our adolescent children how to get pregnant by concentrating on the role of contraceptives in preventing unwanted pregnancy. We are asking that all sex education covers the topics of abstinence, which means waiting until two consenting adults are in a heterosexual marriage, that being between one man and woman that are able to deal with the consequences of sexual actions. Even in marriage there are periods of abstinence for example, no sexual relations after the birth of a child for 6 weeks.

b. Chastity Sex education must teach chastity which is the disciplined action of adults to wait for sexual relations until they are in a heterosexual marriage between consenting adults comprising of one female and male human person.

c. Young men and women must be taught how to relate to the opposite sex as a friend, not a freely available sexual object, how to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner in the company of the opposite sex, how to speak and dress when in the opposite sex's company.

d. Parents must have the right to veto any sex education and human development subjects that they feel violated their rights to be the primary care giver to the child and will initiate premature sexualization of their child.

The teaching of both abstinence and chastity to our adolescent children is the only way to prevent unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease or physiological damage from unwanted sexual activity between underdeveloped children who are not able to handle

the consequences of premature sexual activity. The government will save thousands of dollars in solving unwanted pregnancies, counseling, sexual health and other associated problems.

Abstinence is the only 100% contraceptive method to stop unwanted pregnancy available to the human person.

Young men and women are very vulnerable when it comes to teaching sex education. If we get it wrong we will do irreparable harm to them for life.

7. Develop the role of a Federal Children's Commissioner

This person will act in the same capacity as the Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner but be responsible for overseeing all material in the public domain that affects the violation of children rights to protection of their innocence from oversexualized material in the media, advertising, television, radio, internet, merchandise in shops and the public domain.

There must be a transparent channel for complaints that must have a turn around time of four weeks that covers any complaint that an individual or body of people feels warranted to make to bring concern about the violation of the innocence of Australian children. Anything that pertains to the oversexualization of our children will be covered by this complaints system. Much thought must be put into the development of the guidelines for the newly created position. It must not be filled by anyone who has in any capacity or way lobbied in a voluntary or paid position for any aspect for increasing the powers of the sex industry.

As parents we trust you will give full consideration to our submission. We have had enough of the material in the contemporary media that is causing the oversexualization of our Australian children. Enough is enough, government must take responsibility for protecting the children who are the future leaders of this great country. Our public spaces need be cleaned up of the sexually polluting material that is ruining our children. We must act now before it is too late. Once our children's innocence is corrupted we will never be able to regain it. As parents we have one chance to get it right.

Mrs Bernadette Jee

Chairman – Parents for a Real Choice