

18/4/2008

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

Re: Inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the contemporary media environment

While I address each of the terms of reference for the above inquiry, it will be useful to note the following principle throughout. Companies that sell legal, yet restricted products, are not allowed to advertise these products. The ban on advertising includes, but is not restricted to, billboards, TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, internet, email, sponsorship of sporting codes, and the sponsorship of sporting teams. Stores are permitted to sell these products, but not allowed to advertise them in catalogues or on their websites.

Cigarette companies are bound by this principle, and it is enshrined in law.

We, as a community, through the parliament, have decided that the physical health of the nation is placed in jeopardy by smoking. While the parliament does not totally ban smoking, it does restrict the sale of cigarettes, where one can smoke, and prohibit all forms of cigarette advertising.

*1. Examine the sources and beneficiaries of premature sexualisation of children in the media.*

Sexually explicit or suggestive billboards, free to air TV shows, advertisements and computer games to name but a few are all sources of premature sexualisation of children. Children learn to read anywhere from 3-4 years of age, and will ask, what does "Want longer laster sex?" mean.

The earlier children are sexualised, the higher the likelihood that they will start engaging in sexual behaviour. Obviously, it is to the benefit of those companies advertising longer laster sex and condoms that children start being made aware of their products as early as possible. Sexually explicit or suggestive messages in TV programs and advertising support the erosion of a child's innocence.

Some would suggest that age appropriate sex education could help to minimise the damage done by such a proliferation of sexual images. I would contend that sex education provided in schools contributes to the sexualisation of children. Sexually explicit programs introduce ideas much too early to innocent children, and encourages them to explore their sexuality, so long as they do it "safely".

The various Sexual Health and Family Planning Associations around Australia are members of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. The IPPF and its members are the largest provider of contraceptive and abortion services in the world. They have a vested interest in getting children sexually active as early as possible.

*2. Review the evidence on the short- and long-term effects of viewing or buying sexualising and objectifying images and products and their influence on cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, sexuality, attitudes and beliefs.*

The short term effects are that younger and younger children are becoming increasingly sexualised in their dress, speech and behaviour. They are living in a world where innocence is not valued. Purity and modesty are wrongly seen as archaic "vices" of bygone oppressed ages. Purity and modesty should be viewed as beautiful gifts that protect the innocence of children.

A sexually promiscuous culture sells the lie that you can have sex with who you want, when you want, without any strings attached. Sex is sold simply as a pleasurable activity, with the other natural end, children, seen as an inconvenient side effect that should be stopped at all costs.

Men and women are reduced to objects for sexual gratification. With marriage and children removed from the equation, it is the natural conclusion. We are living with the long term results of this now. Pornography, brothels,

divorce, abortion and STD's. These result in reducing moral standards even further. We as a society are digging a deeper and deeper pit.

Our children and young people are living in a harsher environment. Their earlier sexualisation was supposed to lead them to happiness and liberation from the social norms of the past. Instead of happiness, they are being sold into sexual slavery and despair.

Here are the trends that were observed in America from 1960 to 1999 when early sexualisation and the supposed counter measure, sex education were in full swing.

- Abortions increased from 200,000 to 1.4million per year.
- Single Parent families increased from 9% to 32%.
- Term pregnancy increased from 30 per 1000 to 110 per 1000.
- The incidence of STD's increased 245%.
- The rate of teen suicide increased 286% from 3.6 to 13.9 per 100,000 annually.

*3. Examine strategies to prevent and/or reduce the sexualisation of children in the media and the effectiveness of different approaches in ameliorating its effects, including the role of school-based sexuality and reproductive health education and change in media and advertising regulation such as the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice and the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice.*

The affects are clear. But like those who still say that cigarettes don't cause cancer, there are those who would deny the abundant evidence of the effects of the premature sexualisation of children.

Just as cigarette advertising is banned, all sexual explicit or suggestive advertising and media should be banned.

This includes advertising for all sex products, including condoms, events or advertisements that use sexual messages to sell their products, (eg "Speeding, no one thinks big of you" and "Sexpo").

TV shows that have sexually explicit or suggestive content should be prohibited. If this results in channels only havng enough content for 10 hours a day, so be it. It would be better for us and our children.

Magazines that have sexually explicit or suggestive content should be removed from public display in shops and newsagencies, and be restricted in sale to those over the age of 18. Those found passing these magazines onto minors should be prosecuted. This would be the first step in the eventual total ban of these magazines.

This may seem harsh and extreme. However, people once thought that smoking was good for you. Who would have ever thought that the Winfield would be banned from sponsoring the Rugby League? Or that smoking would be banned in pubs?

I have already outlined the role of school-based sexuality and reproductive health education in compounding the sexualisation of children in my reponses to the first and second points above. Sex education as it currently stands adds fuel to the fire. "And whosoever shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me; it were better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck, and he were cast into the sea." Mark 9:41

Current sex education should be replaced with abstinence based programs that teach children the value of their purity and the importance of marriage.

John Gresser