

Submission to *the Inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the contemporary media environment*

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this Inquiry. My family and I have been concerned about the issue for some time. Media, television and the internet in particular, have eroded the ability of parents to always choose the information they wish to expose their children to. Their right to judge their child's maturity to receive information is taken away.

We are outraged when a predator leads a child into a situation of abuse but often a fictional situation acted out in our own living room is disregarded. No matter how vigilant a parent, things are missed or it is not possible to discuss an issue immediately.

Advertising goes one step further by actively promoting 'adult' behaviour as glamorous and acceptable. As a child grows into its sexuality in our pluralist society, it is becoming increasingly difficult for her/him to know clearly what is acceptable and what might be best avoided, natural rebellion works against parents and promotional media is believed: if something is presented often enough it is no longer questioned. Balance in guiding a child to maturity is difficult to achieve and parents need support.

Your challenge is not an easy one because our pluralist society needs to be respected: the lines are not clearly drawn. Today's children are more and more being robbed of their childhood: both parents often need to be involved in full time employment. Schools are being asked to take on roles that really belong to parents. In trying to protect children we often undermine the parent's role.

At present we are

- increasingly dependent on child care from outside the family
- imposing responsibilities that belong to the parent on schools
- allowing exposure at an early age to concepts requiring more maturity than they possess
- encouraging children to remain in school much longer
- delaying the need to develop personal values and independence
- allowing consumerism to exploit children

Parents need every possible support to bring up their children who are the future of Australia. Legislation is needed that will force those involved in media to

- consider the effects of early sexualisation
- use their creativity to enhance children's lives, rather than make them more difficult.

Any programs introduced in schools to ameliorate the effects of damage should be based on

- enriching the dignity of the person: men and women
- exploring the equal but complimentary natures of male and female in a positive way
- the equal responsibility of male and female in relationships.
- acceptance that a baby (foetus) is not just an unfortunate accident, but a person who has the right to a future.

Early sexualisation makes it much more difficult for a young man or woman to take responsibility for the outcomes of their actions and thus grow into mature human beings.

That this Inquiry has been convened shows that we in Australia value our greatest resource for the future and my thoughts will be with you as you sift through the information you receive.

Margaret McDonald
11 April, 2008

Let nothing trouble you,
Let nothing scare you

All is fleeting – only god suffices Terese of Avila