

I would like to make a submission into the inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the contemporary media environment.

As a mother of three, professional counsellor who works with teenagers and young people, I have grave concerns with the sexualisation of children and the effects that the media has on them. I have concerns that there are not any regulations in place about what is put in the public eye, both through advertising and through products that are far beyond a child's develop and yet they are being targeted as a way to make money. I will cover my concerns and my examples in dot point.

- As a mother, I can't even take my children to the public toilets without them enquiring about the signs up around them. Miss 10 and Miss 8 asked me the other day at the toilet in the movies "What is genital herpes?" after seeing it behind the toilet door. Other common questions I get after a visit to the toilets are "What is a condom?" "What is the pill?". Why do we not remember that it is not only adults that are using the toilets and children who can read are using them. They are too young to be asking those questions but at the ages of 10 and 8, you can't just excuse those questions without a thousand more that follow it!
- Signs up as we drive around. "lasting longing sex" plastered over bill boards...children are reading these signs and is a cause of sexualisation. I know for a fact as a counsellor that children exposed to sexual ideas and themes too early does affect them. They do not have the understanding, nor are ready to handle such concepts until they themselves ask the questions with no stimulus from the media, but by natural development.
- Children, particularly girls between the ages of 8 – 12 are being exposed to sexual themes through toys such as the bratz dolls, sexy clothing and 'bras and undies'. These are all causes them to 'grow up' faster then they should. They are encouraged by music videos, dancing, songs, toys and clothes to be a sexual being through copying (as this is a way children learn to be adults, by copying their surroundings, again, something I've studied through my profession and now am experiencing through my motherhood) As a parent, I feel out of control about when and where and how I want my children to learn about sex, as the media takes over and continually bombards them with sexual innuendo. And then we are surprised with the amount of abuse in today's culture...interesting.
- The internet and web sites are another way this is having an effect on children and sexualising them. My children are continually bombarded through children's web sites that they are taught at school and when they are on them, other ads come up and they have to be taught (at 5 years old in prep!) what to do if you see something 'inappropriate' on the internet. How does a child know what is inappropriate unless you tell them, and if you tell them, then they know what it is. As a result of the way girls are drawn on the internet and the 'dress up' dolls on some of the web sites, my girls look in the mirror telling me how fat they are at 8 and 10. What the??? My 8 year old is 17 kilos and the tiniest little thing and yet lives in fear of being fat! With all the media around, I am not surprised that they are already worrying about things that they don't need to worry about, instead of enjoying being a kid while they can. Interesting that the media continually talks about the rights of a child to have an education for example, and yet not the rights of a child to actually be a child and have a childhood, rather than being forced to grow up faster and faster as a result of what they are exposed to by the culture around them.

I could keep going, but I'm sure you get the picture.

I ask you as a professional counsellor and a mother to please put in protection regulations in regards to the current trends of advertising, marketing and the media and the effects on children. They need proper protection and we are the ones they need to give it to them. Imagine if there were regulations about advertising, about music clips, about what is written on children's clothing, about what dolls look like etc. How different the world around us would be. We have the power to do this, to impact a generation.

Children deserve a childhood. They certainly deserve to be protected from sexualisation. They deserve to learn about sex in their own time and development. They deserve to learn that sex is not about body image, clothing, having longer lasting sex, worrying about STI's etc, but about a loving relationship between two people that is natural, beautiful and pure...not rude and perverted. Children are not an object to be used to make money, because someone might see a gap in the market and want their product out there and they don't care what child reads or watches their advertising. Children are *people* who will grow to take on this country, the next generation. Let's help them be the best human beings they can by not exploiting them. Lest it to be late and we have a perverted generation, riddled with being sexualized too early and obsessed with sex, body and image....as a result there will not be enough counsellors and doctors around to deal with the effects.

Yours sincerely,

Kym Keady