

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts Department
of the Senate Parliament House Canberra

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I wish to raise my concerns as a parent and as an academic regarding the way in which advertising has been increasingly dependent on sexualisation of children and young people. It is my view that great harm can be done to the maturation and appropriate development of attitudes and practices in children and adolescence where a healthy view of sexuality is skewed by inappropriate media images and emphasis on children as a kind of sexual "bait" to increase purchasing.

Self-regulation by the advertising industry has not respected reasonable community expectations in this area. Children need to be children, not portrayed as in sexualised ways which may influence them subtly but irrevocably. Childhood innocence and a variety of personal aspirations and goals are too valuable in the next generation to be sacrificed so that consumerist behaviour increases. So often, these sexualised images are place where one cannot avoid seeing them, so it is not simply a matter of avoiding inappropriate material by choosing not to view certain television and film offerings. Our community is served very badly by this type of advertising aimed at - and manipulatively employing - young people. In a period where paedophilia has become a significant social problem, the community should be seriously tackling breaches of appropriate community standards in advertising, of the kind which encouraging adults preying on children as sexual objects. The parliament should take the necessity of this type of child protection as one of its priority issues, as so much depends on children growing up with a healthy balanced view of themselves as community contributors who are taken seriously and seen as precious, rather than just as a sexual commodity.

Whenever I have delivered conference papers on the problems of so-called "dirty realism" in young adult fiction I have been amazed at how many parents have gathered around afterwards to confirm their concerns to me on this subject. What children read, see and hear shapes their developing view of the world, and so is of enormous significance to parents.

The growing community anger in this area needs to be heeded.

Yours Sincerely,

Jill Ireland