

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

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April 17, 2008

Dear Sir/ Madam,

We are parents of two girls, aged 11 and 7. We write because we are concerned about the difficulty we face in preserving their innocence in the face of a seemingly constant barrage of inappropriate material that is either directly targeted at them or unavoidable in the course of daily living.

From inappropriate advertising (for sexualised dolls such as Bratz; programs airing that evening where sexual tension is clear displayed in the trailer; mobile phone text services that claim to tell you whether your partner is cheating on you etc.), during weekend sport on television to billboards on major arterial roads enquiring in 3 metre letters: "Want Longer Lasting SEX?"

We understand that the current system relies on self-regulation. We would argue that this is not serving the interests of the community and is pressuring children to grow up too quickly and to confront material that they cannot process and understand properly.

We strongly support any move to tighten advertising standards and ensure that children are not exposed to material of a sexual nature, and particularly that marketing that is directed to children does not involve sexualisation or sexualised images of dolls or characters designed to appeal to them.

We also note that music videos with highly sexualised dance routines are commonplace on morning television. While our daughters are not allowed to watch such programs they are sometimes unavoidable – such as when the television is turned on, or when flicking between different channels.

Exposure to such music videos directly influences the play of our daughters and their peers. This is harmful to their natural forms of play and their own development as pre-pubescent girls; it feeds directly into the culture of unhealthy obsession with body image and a perception of worth based principally on sexual attraction.

We are also concerned about the risks that Internet access poses to our daughters. To date we have not allowed them to get their own e-mail addresses (due in large measure to the risk of pornographic and sexual spam) – not to access websites for school projects etc. without our direct supervision. We welcome efforts to increase the protection offered to people to perform searches on the Internet that do not expose them to unsolicited and unwelcome pornographic and sexual images.

Childhood should be protected as a time of innocent play and gradual development – commensurate with the understanding and growth of each individual child. Accelerating sexual development and through exposure to sexualised images in the media does not pose a risk to individual children but impacts across the community.

We greatly appreciate the committee's decision to pursue the current enquiry and for the sake of future generations' mental and sexual health ask that you act decisively to end the creeping tendency to increased the use of sexualised imagery and sexual messages in mainstream media.

Yours Faithfully,

Trevor Thomas

Jude Powell Thomas