

The Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Environment,  
Communications & the Arts  
PO Box 6100 Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

17 April 2008

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: RESPONSE TO CALLS FOR PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS INTO THE  
*SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN IN THE  
CONTEMPORARY MEDIA ENVIRONMENT***

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission into this important inquiry. After reading the Canberra Times, *Forum*, section article on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2008 entitled, "*Too much flesh, far too young*", (by Kate Hannon) I was inspired to write and state my opinions. I agree wholeheartedly with their observations and comments.

There is something seriously wrong with our society if we are not morally outraged by the content of and themes in advertising, magazines, music video clips and clothing aimed at, or readily available to, our children and pre-teens.

**Our ability, as parents, to provide a responsible moral covering over our children and pre-teens is being undermined as we are bombarded with heavily sexualized content in all media advertising, newspapers, magazines, music, catalogues, on television and in clothing.** We cannot escape it when we go shopping, to the movies, school, or even in our own homes through free-to-air television, newspapers and catalogues. It is unavoidable and, therefore, **there must be tighter controls on how sex is used to sell everything.**

**It is completely unacceptable for people to violate my child's innocence in order to get my cash.**

Each and every one of us has the fundamental and undeniable need to be loved, valued and accepted. We not only look to loved ones for this but are affected by environmental and societal cues. Current trends in product marketing and in all forms of media give a fundamentally wrong idea to our children of what is required of them to be loved, valued and accepted. Children, of course, are particularly vulnerable as they do not have a mature capacity to sort out reality from fiction. It is hard enough for adults to not be influenced and I believe this has far-reaching effects on the rest of their lives.

Premature sexualisation of children affects their physical, mental and spiritual well-being. I believe this does not occur only through the clothes, magazines, music, advertising and products explicitly targeted to the pre-teen market, but it occurs by the exposure by children to the adult products, programs, movies, clothing, advertising etc. which appear everywhere, **seemingly without limitation.**

### Television

We try to protect our children by making informed choices about which TV programs are appropriate for them to view. However, we are regularly horrified by the advertisements during these programs for upcoming adult programs (which we would never allow our children to watch) displaying sexually provocative scenes or language.

Furthermore, do not underestimate the impact that a momentary glimpse of a disturbing image while flicking through TV channels can have on a person, let alone a child. These images cannot be erased and can be carried through life. The Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice must raise their standards and monitor what goes to air much more closely.

### Music

Music video clips contain some of the worst images and messages. Music plays such an important part in socialisation, yet the messages and images are simply filthy, as in the case of the "Pussy Cat Dolls". Scantly clad women, gyrating, posing and proclaiming their power over men using their sexual prowess is abhorrent. It seems that their catch-cry is, 'she who has the most boys, wins'. Men are being emasculated and women appear to use sex as a tool of manipulation to get what they want or to be fulfilled as a person. No wonder there are increasing numbers of dysfunctional relationships and family breakdowns if we are modeling ourselves on this.

### Clothing

Many personal friends have been dismayed and disgusted when shopping for clothing for their daughters in major retail chains; their choices limited by excessive numbers of items that are designed to be tight-fitting, too short or cropped or that have inappropriate slogans, such as the "Little Losers" range. These fashions 'require' certain body types for them to 'look good', and thus already a child's body image has begun to be molded. **I know of a six year old girl who refused to enjoy her Christmas dinner last year, in case she put on weight. The eight year old daughter of a friend's acquaintance weighs herself daily.**

How can we deny that the images they see and the 'role-models' projected onto them are having negative impacts on young lives?

### Education

I also do not agree that school, especially not primary school, is the place for children to be educated on sex. That is a parent's responsibility. Resources on helping a parent to undertake the education at home is more desirable and helpful. I do not condone sex before or out of marriage, nor between same sex couples and would definitely not want this to be encouraged or normalized through the education system.

Another area within schools where it seems premature sexualisation is becoming more acceptable is in **school-prescribed reading books**. Although my children are not yet at that stage, my Sister-in-law has been disgusted by the books available to her primary school aged children both in libraries and on school book lists as required reading. Disgusting language and sexual themes are becoming more and more common-place in fiction books. There should be no place for it in school reading material.

### **Males and mixed messages**

I am also terribly concerned about what messages my sons are receiving from the way women and girls dress and act. I want them to respect girls, women and sex, but they are receiving so many mixed messages. Girls are acting and dressing seductively, yet boys are not meant to be turned on by them? It is reality that males are 'visual' creatures - they are more likely than women to be aroused by what they see. They don't need any additional encouragement. **I do not want to encourage lust in any male for my pre-teen daughter. Ask an 8 year old Cambodian child-prostitute what it's like for her to have men find her 'sexually desirable'.**

**Children dressing up seductively and acting like adults is not innocent fun. It is dangerous and abhorrent. It is our duty as parents and mature adults to foresee the effects on our children of what they are consuming now, as they cannot and should not be expected to themselves.**

### **I'd like to make some recommendations:**

1. Music video clips must be censored – visually and lyrically when viewed in prime viewing times. I.e., After 6am and before 9pm.
2. Television censorship must exclude more than swearing or nudity; for example provocative language eluding to sex, and provocative or seductive clothing and body language. These are not acceptable for viewing by children under 16, and not between the hours of 6am and 9pm.
3. Television advertisements for adult television shows themselves must be censored and monitored much more closely, especially between 6am and 9pm.
4. Sex education must not be presented in primary schools. It must not be compulsory in high schools, and the content must be vetted and approved by parents.
5. Schools must not allow sexual content in their reading material. School reading books should be read and approved by parents and teachers before they are placed on school reading lists.
6. There must be regulations on what type of clothing is available to our children mainstream and what slogans are acceptable for the general public to wear. The 'Little Losers' range, for instance, is completely unacceptable for adults to wear in public, let alone for children to see or wear.
7. Padded bras for 8 year olds are unacceptable.
8. Models under the age of 16 must not appear modeling women's clothing or in provocative advertising.

9. Girls' or pre-teens' magazines must also be monitored closely. Women such as Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan and others should not be raised up as role models. Encouraging crushes and boyfriends in teen magazines is not acceptable.
10. Toy ranges, such as "Bratz" dolls, should be banned or toned down. They are normalizing 'sexy' clothing and bad attitudes.

**Normalization of sex should not be tolerated nor encouraged in childhood. Let our children be children. Let us not awaken their desires by force before they are ready. Let sex be upheld as a beautiful gift for an appropriate age within the protective boundaries of marriage. The moral bar must not be lowered for the sake of greed. The benefits of raising our standards will yield far more than financial benefits**

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views and for setting up this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

**Lisa Gaston**