

**small screen Guest editorial April 2007**

Duncan Fine's admiration of Paris Hilton (Opinion, *The Australian*, 18/05/07 "Paris is good for kids") makes all the sense in the world. She stands for the same values he appears to, a total addiction to being noticed. A lack of clear thinking. An inability to construct a coherent life beyond simply getting in the papers.

The real person that is Paris Hilton, the little girl she once was and the old woman she one day will be, would in a better world be left alone. We should look away as we should when a drunken woman exposes herself. Caring friends should take her home.

But the Paris Hilton we all know is not a person. She's an icon, and we make our icons from deep unconscious places, to reflect our times, to help us struggle with large forces. The great soap opera of our lives is played out by these archetypes who represent our collective lives.

We need a Paris Hilton because feminism has wavered, drifted, and seeped away in a miasma of academic self indulgence and careerism, while girls and young women are still being trashed by the lack of real mentors and helpers through the dangerous passage to adulthood. Paris represents the clear and present danger that all affluent young women face - what happens to a human being who has no centre.

Paris Hilton did not make her own image, as Duncan Fine thinks. She simply fell into the nearest, deepest pothole. She's the Paris we had to have. The icon Paris was crafted over time by a thousand journalists, columnists, photo editors, who saw someone really screwing up in a very public way, despite a huge monetary start in life, and couldn't resist satirizing them. As a result, she's seen by the adult world with scorn, derision, and boredom, in about equal amounts. She's fascinating in the way a slowly unfolding bus crash is fascinating.

The recent and important concern about sexualizing children, corporate paedophilia as it is quite accurately called, arises from our mismanagement of sex and the disappearance of love in our society. Sexuality as a commodity is a terrible thing to build an identity on - it has all but destroyed Elle McPherson, and it is endangering our beloved Kylie. It's about the outside, whereas personhood is about the inside. It's the advertising lie laid bare. It doesn't satisfy. You get used and thrown away.

The real concern, and the most important focus we must draw here is that adolescent girls are having less and less time with older women who could help and teach and simply support them - mothers, sisters, aunts, teachers; and more and more time with screens and magazines. They are easy prey for marketers, and marketers have slunk in like hyenas to drag them down. Sexuality is an empowering and beautiful force in adolescence, when the adolescent chooses and controls its eventual unfolding on their own terms. When its separated out as a way to get love, for those who are not loved enough, then lives, tens of thousands of lives, are diminished, harmed, and sometimes thrown away.

We need to see clearly what Paris Hilton represents. We also need to remember every day the image of two soft faced young girls' corpses swinging from the limb of a mountain ash tree overlooking the city lights. We need to take better care of our girls.

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