



Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts

Inquiry into the sexual isation of children April 2008

Young Media Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

This submission has been prepared for Young Media Australia by Associate Prof. Elizabeth Handsley (Vice President) and Barbara Biggins OAM (Hon CEO) on behalf of the Board of the Australian Council on Children and the Media (trading as Young Media Australia (YMA)). For further information, please contact Barbara Biggins at above address.

Elizabeth Handsley is a specialist in media law as it relates to children, and Barbara Biggins is CEO of YMA, and a former member of the Children's Program Committee of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, and former Convenor of the federal Classification Review Board.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Young Media Australia (YMA) is the trading name of the Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM). The ACCM is a not-for-profit national community organisation structured as a company limited by guarantee. The ACCM has a national Board of Directors representing the states and territories of Australia, and has a national membership of organisations and individuals who support the aims of the organisation, viz to stimulate and maintain public interest in the provision of suitable films and television programs for children.
2. The ACCM has a comprehensive organisational membership which includes ECA (Early Childhood Australia (formerly AECA Australian Early Childhood Association)), ACSSO (Australian Council of State Schools Organisations), AHISA (Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia), AEU (Australian Education Union), SAPPA (South Australian Primary Principals Association), Federation of NSW P&C (Parents & Citizens), and the Mothers' Union in Australia. Our members have a special interest and/ or expertise in media issues and children.
3. Young Media Australia's mission is to promote a quality media environment for Australian children and to raise community awareness of children's needs in relation to the media.
4. YMA's core activities include the collection of research and information about the impact of media on children's development, and advocacy for the needs and interests of children in relation to the media.

5. Young Media Australia's core services include:

- a 24/7 freecall helpline 1800 700 357,
- a website www.youngmedia.org.au containing a wealth of media-related information (attracting over 1000 visits per day),
- a popular child-friendly movie review service (*Know before you go*),
- the development of parent media awareness materials, and
- making submissions, and participating in media interviews, related to media regulation.

B. THE BASIS FOR YMA's SUBMISSION

Young Media Australia bases its submission on the following principles and knowledge base:

1. *The International Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 17*, viz

"Parties recognise the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health. To this end, States Parties shall: ...

(e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of Article 13 and 18."

Article 13, paraphrased, supports the rights of children to seek and receive information and ideas of all kinds, subject to restrictions to protect public health.

Article 18, paraphrased, supports parents in their primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children, but requires that institutions support parents in this role.

2. *Objectives b), h), i) and j) from the Broadcasting Services Act, s 3*

(b) to provide a regulatory environment that will facilitate the development of a broadcasting industry in Australia that is efficient, competitive and responsive to audience needs; and ...

(h) to encourage providers of broadcasting services to respect community standards in the provision of program material; and

(i) to encourage the provision of means for addressing complaints about broadcasting services; and

(j) to ensure that providers of broadcasting services place a high priority on the protection of children from exposure to program material which may be harmful to them ...

3. *The Policy Guidelines on Children's Television developed by the Australian Council for Children and the Media.*

4. *YMA's ongoing collection and review of the research literature*

In the preparation of this submission, YMA has reviewed the research literature as it relates to the impact of media on children. This is an ongoing activity of YMA. A select list of such literature is appended (Appendix 2).

5. YMA's ongoing involvement in Standards and Codes as they impact on children

In the preparation of this submission, YMA has relied on its experience and active involvement in the use and maintenance of children's TV standards, the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice, the National Classification Code and the *Guidelines for the Classification for films and computer games*, and for *Publications*.

C. SUMMARY COMMENTS

Young Media Australia commends the Senate for investigating these issues. They have long been of concern to Young Media Australia and its members.

Further, we note that there is growing world-wide concern about the sexualisation of children.

The sexualisation of children has two aspects. One is the sexualisation of children and adolescents themselves in the media, and the other is the exposure of children to sexualised images, irrespective of whether these include children or not.

YMA believes that:

- a) Children should not be directly portrayed in sexualised ways in the media as it is harmful to the development of the child portrayed and/ or to the child viewing the representation.
- b) Children should not be exposed to exploitative and superficial representations of teen and adult sexuality in the media at times and in environments where they have every right to be.

While both aspects of this problem are important, the deeply important issue for children's health and welfare is how they are represented to themselves (a). This issue goes beyond the issue of which aspects of adult life children are exposed to and extends to images of what children should wear, how they should play, how they should measure their own success, and so on.

YMA notes here the useful definition of "sexualisation" used by the American Psychological Association in its 2007 study, viz "sexualisation occurs when a person's value comes only from her/his sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics, and when a person is sexually objectified".

D. DETAILED COMMENT ON TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The sources and beneficiaries of premature sexualisation of children in the media

YMA finds that children are sexualised *in* advertisements and articles in magazines directed at children. Such magazines include Total Girl, Bratz, KZone, Little Angel.

The content of many such magazines gives a strong message that being sexy (via cosmetics, age-inappropriate clothing, constant images of sexy role models etc) is important even if you're only six.

Children are also presented in a sexualised manner in clothing advertisements and catalogues.

YMA finds children are also sexualised *by* media images of adult sexuality which are inappropriately placed in spaces which children frequent – for example day time TV music video shows, outdoor billboards, the Internet.

YMA has read and endorses the submission sent to this Inquiry from Julie Gale of Kf2bK Kids Free to be Kids. YMA is acting in partnership with Kf2bK on the issue of the sexualisation of children in the media.

Kf2bK has supplied to this Inquiry many examples of media and product content which portrays children in sexualised ways, and which exposes children to highly explicit portrayals of adult sexuality.

The beneficiaries of such sexualisation are not children and their families. They are the publishers and distributors of such media.

2. The evidence on the short and long term impacts

2.1 Australian health and welfare professionals in Australia have been expressing their concerns about this issue.

In 2006 and 2007, YMA facilitated the writing of letters to the press from a group of 12 Australian professionals with expertise on children's health and welfare. These letters can be found in Appendix 3.

Some further quotations will give an idea of the depth of the widely shared concerns:

“Commercial forces turn children into consumers. This is bad enough when compromises health by encouraging them to consume bad food, cigarettes and alcohol. But when commercial forces turn children into sexualised commodities, it corrodes the core of the developing child and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.”

Prof Dorothy Scott, Director, Australian Centre for Child Protection,
University of South Australia

“Child development is about play, exploration and experimentation. Child sexual development is not different. When we expose a child to sexual images and messages beyond their years, they don’t understand this image/message and will seek to understand it through play. This undoubtedly leads to sexual play and behaviours in children outside of normal development.”

Lisa Cox , psychologist and child protection specialist, Childwise
Australia.

“Sex and sexuality have been divorced from emotions and feelings of intimacy and are being packaged as something attainable at a very young age and essential to social kudos and peer group acceptance. Being perceived as ‘sexy’ and a young person’s (but particularly girls) self-esteem is inextricably linked. This is reflected, not only through popular culture, but in practice – in the real world. The rise of body dysmorphic image, depression, low self-esteem, and the age at which young people first engage in sexual activity are all indicators that when sexual imagery bombards young people, it skews their sense of self and the relationship they have with each other, the opposite sex and within their social groups.”

Dr Karen Brooks, formerly Snr lecturer, Communications and
Cultural Studies, University of Sunshine Coast

Brooks also says:

“Children are neither cognitively or emotionally ready to deal with sexualised images of adults. Not only does viewing this kind of material seriously impact on a child’s sense of self, but their understanding of the role adults play in their life. It undermines their sense of safety, of boundaries and rules and, depending on the images, exposes them to and normalises practices that they should be shielded from”.

2.2 Landmark report in Australia

The Australia Institute’s October 2006 report “Corporate Paedophilia” is a landmark report in terms of summarising the concerns and research about this issue. It is to be highly commended to the Inquiry.

2.3 Overseas reports and research

The American Psychological Association issued a report summarising the issues and research in 2007. The press release for this report and the composition of the Task Force for the APA can be found at Appendix 1.

2.4 The Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood

This US organisation held a Summit on the Sexualisation of Children just two weeks ago <http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/events/summit.htm>

CCFC advises that videos of presentations at this summit will be available on their website shortly.

CCFC has also recently published a useful Fact Sheet on this topic.

2.5 International research

YMA has compiled a list of research on this topic and this can be found at Appendix 2.

3. The strategies for prevention/ harm minimisation

3.1 Regulatory approaches

3.1.1 General discussion

YMA wishes to emphasise that we see the representation of children *in* the media as more important, and more in need of attention at the present time, than the issues around exposure of children to impactful portrayals of adult sexuality.

This is not because the latter is not important, but there are laws already in place which should restrict the dissemination of sexual content in places where children will be exposed to it. Although these laws are clearly in need of tightening-up, (as the Kf2bK submission demonstrates) there are no laws that directly confront the dissemination of material that encourages children to see sexiness as a measure of their success, nor as important for their self concept.

One reason that current laws and regulations are unequal to the task of addressing the issue we have identified is that they tend to rest on narrow and traditionalist views of issues regarding sex and the media.

This is well-illustrated by the Advertising Standards Board's findings, cited in the submission from Kf2bK, that turn on issues such as whether a woman's nipples are visible.

The modern critique of pornography, and other sexualised images, is not about which bits of the anatomy one sees, but about the way that people (especially women) are objectified, or commodified. This can be done even

if the person in the image is fully clothed, as indeed some of the pictures in the Kf2bK submission demonstrate.

What is of concern is the model of sex and sexuality that this propagates, which places a heavy emphasis on looks, or a particular type of beauty, and on using other people and their bodies for one's own enjoyment. It separates sex off from healthy respectful relationships. When children are involved, either as subjects, as target audience, or even as innocent bystanders, these concerns are all the greater.

In brief, if it is true that 'sex sells' this does not make it appropriate to use sex to sell to children.

3.1.2 The new AANA Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children

Recently the advertising industry moved to address the issue of sexualisation of children, with amendments to its *Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children*. Young Media Australia made a detailed submission to the AANA review, and few if any of our recommendations were adopted.

As to the sexualisation issue, we made recommendations very similar to those we are making to this Inquiry, namely to prevent the direct portrayal of children in sexualised ways, and the careless exposure of children to representations of teen and adult sexuality. We also urged the same range of measures for developing strategies, education, training and so on.

The *Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children's* new provision on sexualisation reads as follows:

2.4 Sexualisation

Advertising or Marketing Communications to Children:

- (a) must not include sexual imagery in contravention of Prevailing Community Standards;
- (b) must not state or imply that Children are sexual beings and that ownership or enjoyment of a Product will enhance their sexuality.

The provision applies only to a narrow range of advertising and marketing communications, defined as those that, 'having regard to the theme, visuals and language used, are directed primarily to Children and are for ... goods, services and/or facilities which are targeted toward and have principal appeal to Children.' (Clause 1 – emphasis added)

YMA believes that while the term "sexual imagery" may be somewhat useful as a tool to discuss the issues, it is too vague to be used as a regulatory term. The APA definition may be more appropriate. (see p 3 above)

YMA is not aware of communications in the past that have been directed primarily to children, and for products of principal appeal to children, that

have included sexual imagery; rather the problem is with communications aimed at adults but to which children are frequently exposed.

As to paragraph (b) YMA believes that it does not adequately capture the issue. In order to breach paragraph (b) a communication must state or imply that children are sexual beings, but having regard to the view of Lisa Cox quoted above (page 4), this is not in and of itself an instance of harmful sexualisation. Rather the issue is that children are portrayed in sexualised ways, or ways that replicate adult ideas of what is sexy. To adapt the APA definition of sexualisation, paragraph (b) should apply when a communication states or implies that a child's 'value comes only from her/his sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics'. Paragraph (b) does not pick up this point but provides that statements/implications that children are sexual beings breach the Code only if they also state or imply that the 'Product' will enhance their sexuality. ('Product' for this purpose means 'goods, services and/or facilities which are targeted toward and have principal appeal to Children.') YMA is not aware of any such statements or implications in the media. Community concern, once again, is about the way that sex is used to sell to children, in the sense that the media propagate an idea of how to look, dress and act that is infected with adult notions of sexual attractiveness.

Therefore we conclude that in spite of the new provision in the *Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children*, there is still some way to go in effectively addressing these issues. In particular, we think that the above demonstrates the need for great care to be taken in defining and describing the issue so that all concerned know exactly what we are talking about. It is not about whether children see a nipple on a billboard, and it is not about statements that children are sexual beings. It is about the exposure of children to exploitative and superficial representations of sex and sexuality, and it is about the use of sex to sell to children. YMA would welcome the opportunity to work further with the Committee on these matters which we see as being of key importance.

3.1.3 Codes of practice for other media

YMA considers that the statements in 3.1.1 above should be applied to the Senate's review of whether the present Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice, the National Classification Code and the *Guidelines for the Classification for films and computer games*, and for *Publications* adequately address the issues of the sexualised portrayals of children, and of the exposure of children to exploitative and superficial representations of sex and sexuality.

In YMA's experience, the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice is not adequate to prevent the exposure of children to highly sexualised images such as occur in music videos in G and PG programs on television.

3.1.4 The need for collaboration and careful research

The development of effective Codes to provide a proper level of protection for children is best done via a collaboration of media, children's professionals, community reps and regulators so that the issues are carefully defined.

Next steps could include:

- * Establish sensible guidelines for use across different industries which acknowledges various practices and which are written in plain English;
- * Implement these, firstly on a trial basis, to eliminate oversights and errors (taking into consideration mixed environments and timeslots, children's and adults' only environments and entertainment as well);
- * Fund education and retraining around sexualised imagery for key corporate, media and other key personnel
- * Once perfected, standardise codes and enforce them.

3.2 Parent supports

Parents are increasingly asked to bear most of the responsibility for keeping their children from harm from media impacts, with effective regulatory supports lagging behind developments in media. This issue of care is one which parents find very difficult to counteract, with marketing communications striking at the core of their children's self esteem.

Organisations such as Young Media Australia offer parent media awareness resources and support via its website and national freecall Helpline, but these services have very little ongoing funding. So much more could be done to help parents to avoid potentially harmful impacts if government funding were available and sustained.

3.3 The Australia Institute recommendations Dec 2006

The second report from the Australia Institute "Letting children be children" contains a wealth of useful recommendations and are to be commended to the Inquiry.

One of particular note is that of the establishment of a unit with the power to evaluate and make recommendations in relation to all media that impact on children, and to have within it persons with child development, health and welfare expertise. The present fragmented regulatory system for different aspects of media does not serve the interests of children well.

APPENDIX 1

American Psychological Association Report on sexualised images of girls in media and advertising

APA Press Release

February 19, 2007

Contact: [Public Affairs](#)

(202) 336-5700

(202) 494-0860 (After-hours calls: [Rhea Farberman](#))

SEXUALIZATION OF GIRLS IS LINKED TO COMMON MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN GIRLS AND WOMEN—EATING DISORDERS, LOW SELF-ESTEEM, AND DEPRESSION; AN APA TASK FORCE REPORTS

Psychologists call for replacing sexualized images of girls in media and advertising with positive ones

WASHINGTON, DC—A report of the American Psychological Association (APA) released today found evidence that the proliferation of sexualized images of girls and young women in advertising, merchandising, and media is harmful to girls' self-image and healthy development.

To complete the report, the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls studied published research on the content and effects of virtually every form of media, including television, music videos, music lyrics, magazines, movies, video games and the Internet. They also examined recent advertising campaigns and merchandising of products aimed toward girls.

Sexualization was defined by the task force as occurring when a person's value comes only from her/his sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics, and when a person is sexually objectified, e.g., made into a *thing* for another's sexual use.

Examples of the sexualization of girls in all forms of media including visual media and other forms of media such as music lyrics abound. And, according to the report, have likely increased in number as "new media" have been created and access to media has become omnipresent. The influence and attitudes of parents, siblings, and friends can also add to the pressures of sexualization.

"The consequences of the sexualization of girls in media today are very real and are likely to be a negative influence on girls' healthy development," says Eileen L. Zurbriggen, PhD, chair of the APA Task Force and associate professor of psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. "We have ample evidence to conclude that sexualization has negative effects in a variety of domains, including cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, and healthy sexual development."

Research evidence shows that the sexualization of girls negatively affects girls and young women across a variety of health domains:

Cognitive and Emotional Consequences: Sexualization and objectification undermine a person's confidence in and comfort with her own body, leading to emotional and self-image problems, such as shame and anxiety.

Mental and Physical Health: Research links sexualization with three of the most common mental health problems diagnosed in girls and women—eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression or depressed mood.

Sexual Development: Research suggests that the sexualization of girls has negative consequences on girls' ability to develop a healthy sexual self-image.

According to the task force report, parents can play a major role in contributing to the sexualization of their daughters or can play a protective and educative role. The APA report calls on parents, school officials, and all health professionals to be alert for the potential impact of sexualization on girls and young women. Schools, the APA says, should teach media literacy skills to all students and should include information on the negative effects of the sexualization of girls in media literacy and sex education programs.

"As a society, we need to replace all of these sexualized images with ones showing girls in positive settings—ones that show the uniqueness and competence of girls," states Dr. Zurbriggen. "The goal should be to deliver messages to all adolescents—boys and girls—that lead to healthy sexual development."

Full text of the Executive Summary, Report, and tips on "What Parents Can Do" are available at: <http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html>

Members of the APA Task Force:

Eileen Zurbriggen, PhD (Chair)

Associate Professor of Psychology, Psychology Department, University of California, Santa Cruz

Expertise: Associations between power and sexuality, including rape, childhood sexual abuse, and mental connections between power and sex (such as eroticizing dominance and submission). She is currently conducting a study to investigate the ways in which college students link power and sex, and the messages concerning these linkages that they receive from parents, peers, and the media.

Available for interviews

Sharon Lamb, EdD

*Clinical Psychologist, Professor of Psychology,
Saint Michael's College*

*Co-Author: Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters
from Marketers' Schemes*

Expertise: Licensed psychologist, Professor of Psychology at Saint Michael's College, and co-author with Lyn Mikel Brown of the book "Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters from Marketers' Schemes" (St. Martin's Press, 2006). She has also written on "normal" sexual development in girls and on how therapists can treat sexual issues as they arise in the therapeutic encounter with children and teens. Her research on girls' development, teenagers and sex, and abuse and victimization is widely cited. As a clinical psychologist, she also works with girls in her private practice.

Available for interviews

Tomi-Ann Roberts, PhD

Psychology Department, Colorado College

Expertise: Psychology of gender and emotions. She studies girls' and women's attitudes and

emotions toward their own bodies and body functions in a sexually objectifying culture.

Available for interviews

Deborah Tolman, EdD

Center for Research on Gender and Sexuality, San Francisco State University

Expertise: Adolescent sexuality, specifically the sexuality of girls, focused on their experiences of their own sexuality; gender and its development in adolescence, specifically in tandem with sexuality; how boys' sexuality development and girls' sexuality development co-occur through adolescence; mental health as it relates to gender and sexuality; sexual content on television; sexualization of adolescent girls; and both mental health and healthy sexuality.

Available for interviews

Monique Ward, PhD

Psychology Department, University of Michigan

Expertise: In general, her research examines contributions of parents, peers, and the media to sexual socialization. She has focused on the role of the media in this process, examining how media portrayals shape adolescents' attitudes, expectations, and behaviors related to gender roles, sexual roles, and sexual relationships. She also explores intersections between gender ideologies, body image, and sexuality.

Available for interviews

Rebecca Collins, PhD

RAND Corporation

Expertise: The causes and consequences of health risk behavior, including sex and substance use, in adolescents and adults (in particular, the role of the media in these behaviors).

Unavailable for interviews.

Jeanne Blake, Public Member

Words Can Work

Jeanne Blake is a medical journalist and president of Blake Works, Inc. which produces research and evidence-based multimedia (DVDs, the Words Can Work® series of booklets, wordscanwork.com, and abouthealth.com) about the challenges young people face growing up. She is an affiliated faculty member with the Division on Addictions at Harvard Medical School.

Not a researcher, not recommended for interviews

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The American Psychological Association (APA), in Washington, DC, is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 145,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare.

Appendix 2

List of references for Senate enquiry into sexualisation of children

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APPENDIX 3 LETTERS FROM 12 PROFESSIONALS TO THE PRESS, ON THE SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN.

The Editor

The Australian
letters@theaustralian.com.au

6 December 2006

Dear Sir,

The serious problem of marketing and media practices that promote the early sexualisation of Australian children was well explored in The Australia Institute's October report *Corporate paedophilia*. The many letters to the press, articles, and current affairs segments at that time, showed that this problem seriously concerns many sections of the community. Phillip Adams gave further prominence to the issues in the *Weekend Australian* magazine of 19 November.

It is vital for children's health and wellbeing that the issues remain in the spotlight, and that appropriate and decisive action be taken

We, the undersigned professionals, have worked for many years in the fields of child health, welfare, or media. We believe that the early sexualisation of children has serious consequences for children's development and psychological health.

Commercial forces turn children into consumers. This is bad enough when it compromises health by encouraging them to consume bad food, cigarettes and alcohol. But when commercial forces turn children into sexualised commodities, it corrodes the core of the developing child. These practices set up young children for inappropriate and dangerous roles and behaviours, and make them more vulnerable by far, to sexual danger and harm.

We believe that this issue, if left unchecked, can have serious and costly consequences for the welfare of children, and for the community as a whole.

Parents and caregivers can help by avoiding sexualised products for their children, such as makeup, bras and skimpy clothing for the very young, many music video programs, and "adultified" children's magazines. Government agencies responsible for child health and protection need to urgently examine what supports can be offered.

Those who choose to market to children in this way should bear the primary responsibility for the adverse outcomes of their practices. We note the recent formation of the industry umbrella group, the Australian Marketing Communications Alliance. Member companies are proposing to combine their interests to "fight attacks on advertising and marketing communication" and "underlying threats to free enterprise". We hope that they would also be open to hear, and to respond to, the reasonable and serious concerns of the community.

Phillip Adams threw out this challenge at the conclusion of his article: "They (those marketing to children) should be ashamed of themselves for doing it. We should be ashamed of ourselves for tolerating it."

Yours sincerely

- Dr Neil Wigg. President, Paediatric and Child Health Division of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians.
- Dr Joe Tucci. CEO, Australian Childhood Foundation
- Prof Dorothy Scott. Director, Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia
- Jane Roberts. President, Young Media Australia
- Rita Princi. National Convenor, Australian Psychological Society: Child, Adolescent & Family Interest Group; Princi Consulting
- Prof Frank Oberklaid. Director, Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne
- Dr Louise Newman. Director, NSW Institute of Psychiatry
- Bernadette McMenamin AO. CEO, Childwise Australia
- Dr Patricia Edgar AM. Author and Founding Director, Australian Children's TV Foundation
- Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs AO,
Child Development, University of South Australia
- Steve Biddulph, Psychologist, author, and Australian Father of the Year 2000.
- Hon Terry Aulich. Executive Director, Australian Council of State Schools Organisations

The Editor
The Sunday Age
Melbourne

12 April 2007

Dear Sir,

We the undersigned group of 12 professionals working in the fields of child health, welfare, education and media, have long been concerned about the impact of sexualised images of the young in the media.

We note the recent articles published by *The Sunday Age*, which have highlighted the concerns of parents, and have also indicated that the advertising industry is starting to respond(8/4/07). We write to applaud *The*

Sunday Age in its determination to monitor the situation to see if real progress is achieved.

For this to happen it is necessary for the advertisers and marketers, and the general community, to really understand that real harm can be done to children's development through such media portrayals of the young. It's not enough for the AANA to respond only because of public pressure.

Children need to be protected from sexual exploitation by adults and should be able to develop their own understanding of sexuality in a safe way, and when they are emotionally ready for this. Marketing to, and media representations of children in age-inappropriate ways send a clear message to the community that this is acceptable, and can contribute to the increasing rates of child abuse. And there is much more to the story.

Perhaps *The Sunday Age* could convene a roundtable of children's professionals, [advertisers and marketers](#) where the facts of life could be explained?

Yours sincerely

- Dr Neil Wigg. President, Paediatric and Child Health Division of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians.
- Steve Biddulph, Psychologist, author, and Australian Father of the Year 2000.
- Prof Frank Oberklaid. Director, Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne
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