



## Community vocal at Senate inquiry into sexualisation of children

The Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee has completed taking written submissions and hearing evidence at public hearings in relation to its Inquiry into the sexualisation of children in contemporary media.

Community groups and individuals were prominent in the list of 163 submissions received by the closing date of 18 April, and several of these were invited to give oral evidence at the public hearings held in Melbourne and Sydney on April 29 and 30th.

Among the list of submitters were community based organisations such as Kf2bK: Kids Free to be Kids, Bravehearts, Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends, National Council of Women Australia, Australian Childhood Foundation, Womens' Forum Australia, the Australian Family Association, and Young Media Australia. Children's Commissioners from several states including NSW, Vic and WA, sent submissions, as did the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. Professional organisations such as the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Education Union, and Screen Producers Association of Australia took part, along with the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne and the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney.

Industry views were submitted by the AANA, Free TV Australia, the Australian Children's TV Foundation, Pacific Magazines, and the Advertising Standards Board.

While a considerable range of views was expressed about the nature of the harms, about how to define them, and about the deficiencies of the current regulatory systems in dealing with the impacts, no one could dispute the evidence supplied by Julie Gale of Kf2bK: Kids Free to be kids, who presented items bought from many family style stores in and around Melbourne.

Ms Gale, who recently presented some of her evidence at a seminar in the US on issues related to the premature sexualisation of children, run by the Coalition for a Commercial Free Childhood, quoted the

reaction of US media lecturer and academic Jean Kilbourne. Ms Kilbourne said, "I thought I was way beyond being shocked by anything after my 30 years of research on media images - but many of your images shocked me. It seems the situation in Australia might be even more dire than it is here."

The AANA quoted the World Federation of Advertisers Managing Director as saying "the issues of the sexualisation of children in advertising as recently reported in Australia is not such a matter of concern in other countries". The AANA claimed that its newly issued Code made "further regulation of advertising and marketing communications ...neither a necessary, reasonable nor warranted response to current concerns in the community ..."

Joe Tucci of the Australian Childhood Foundation tabled ongoing research done by the Foundation on children's stresses and anxieties, and said that many children felt that the adult world was intruding too much into their lives, leaving them concerned and worried. The Foundation was of the view that the preponderance of sexualised messages is contributing to an increase in the number of children who are engaging in problem sexual behaviour with other children.

The Australian Psychological Society said that "the values implicit in sexualised images are that physical appearance and beauty are intrinsic to self esteem and social worth, and that sexual attractiveness is a part of childhood experience". Referring to the cognitive effects of exposure to an array of sexualising messages, the APS said "Girls learn to see and think of their bodies as objects of others' desire, to be looked at and evaluated for its appearance." They found that research links sexualisation to three of the most common mental health problems of girls and women: eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression or depressed mood.

Young Media Australia focussed on the definitional and regulatory issues, arguing that it was important to develop an agreed definition of what sort of portrayals and experiences constituted "the sexualisation of children", and to review all of Australia's regulatory systems

to assess if they adequately provided protection from harm. YMA found that the new provisions in the AANA Code did not address the real issues concerning the community YMA strongly supported the Australia Institute's call in its 2006 report *Letting children be children* for a cross media unit which had oversight and input into the development of all media regulation as it impacted on children. YMA also argued for support for its own one-stop-shop for media information.

The Senate committee has been asked to report to Parliament by 23 June 2008. A full list of submissions to the inquiry with links to PDF versions can be found at

[http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/eca\\_ctte/sexualisation\\_of\\_children/submissions/sublist.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/eca_ctte/sexualisation_of_children/submissions/sublist.htm)

Transcripts of the public hearings held as part of the inquiry can be found at

[http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/eca\\_ctte/sexualisation\\_of\\_children/hearings/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/eca_ctte/sexualisation_of_children/hearings/index.htm)

## David Jones drops case

David Jones Limited has dropped its case against The Australia Institute and its former executive director Clive Hamilton over the institute's controversial 2006 paper "Corporate paedophilia -- sexualising children by advertising and marketing".

Of the companies named in the report for using sexualised images of children in their advertising, only David Jones pursued the matter, an action which the Crikey website claims has backfired badly in linking the company with the term "corporate paedophilia" in the minds of the public.

The publicity surrounding the report appears to have had positive consequences. According to the Crikey website, Clive Hamilton says that he has noticed a change in the way that some of the more 'respectable' advertisers present children in their advertisements.

More details about this can be found on the Crikey website at: <http://www.crikey.com.au/Business/20080507-DJs-drops-corporate-paedophilia-case.html> and on the ABC website at: <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2008/s2238364.htm>

COMMUNITY VOCAL AT SENATE INQUIRY

GUEST EDITORIAL: TOO YOUNG TO BE SEXY

VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES AS TEACHERS

DJS DROPS CASE

FOOD LABELLING CAMPAIGN

CAMERAS FOR TODDLERS



no. 241 April 2008

## small screen

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*small screen* is published at the beginning of each month and reports on the events of the previous month 11 issues per year (Dec/Jan double issue)  
 Published by

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YMA is a national, non-profit community organisation. Its mission is to promote a quality media environment for Australian children.

No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission of the Editor. Contributions are welcome.

Young Media Australia's services are supported by grants from the

**The South Australian Attorney General's Department and the Morialta Trust**

Young Media Australia's Web Page and Broadband access are supported by its Internet Service Provider

**Internode**

Publication and printing of *small screen* is sponsored by a donation from  
**Nickelodeon**



## GUEST EDITORIAL

### Too young to be sexy

YMA gets many requests for interviews which assist students at both secondary and tertiary level, and sometimes we receive a copy of the outcomes. Michelle Mc Donald, a Master of Journalism student from the University of Wollongong forwarded us her completed assignment, and we welcomed it (in abbreviated form) as an appropriate guest editorial for this issue. Michelle is a Brisbane based writer interested in Majority World socio-politics and the representations of women and children in the global media.

'Glossies' wallpaper the front aisles at a local newsagency.

"Practise the perfect pout" and avoid meat and dairy products monthly to ensure "smooth skin" suggests one magazine helpfully. A free "bling ring" entices potential purchasers of another, which advertises a perfumed 'Bed Wand' and Body Shop blusher on its "Get back to girly glamour" page.

In the one with a sultry kohl-eyed Avril Lavigne on the cover, a reader, "Confused", asks the guest celebrity advisor, "How do boys act when they have the hots for you?" "Confused" is asking about 'boys' because she is a 'tween'.

Each of these magazines, Bratz Magazine, Total Girl and Girl Power respectively, targets six to thirteen year olds who form the 'tween' marketing demographic.

Independent think tank, The Australia Institute's (TAI) 2006 Corporate Paedophilia report condemns this directly sexualising content in 'tween' magazines.

*"The extension of this genre of magazine to younger ages reflects...their earlier association into the popularised teenage world of fashion, sex and pop stars," write report authors, Dr Emma Rush and Ms Andrea La Nauze. "Girls are also encouraged to view men and boys as sexual objects."*

In local 7-Elevens, Zoo Weekly and Australian Penthouse magazines, featuring digitally perfected and barely clad cover models, are shelved at children's eye level. Next to the two High School Musical links on girl.com.au, you will find another to "Sexy, Hot, Single Women". Semi-naked 'bum clapping' females draped over rappers spitting sexist lyrics appear after the weekend's "C" rated morning television programs.

TAI argues that these kinds of adult images and references sexualise children indirectly, and contribute to eating disorders, negative body image, depression, sexual violence toward women and children, opposite sex objectification and lowered academic performance.

Following TAI's 2006 investigations, the Australian Democrats successfully initiated the Senate to conduct an inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the media.

*"Sexualisation of children is very real and contact*

*with sexual imagery from an early age has a devastating effect on mental and physical health," says Democrats senator, Lyn Allison, in a statement. "We need to restore the concept of innocence."*



**Michelle McDonald**

How are children prematurely sexualised in the Australian media?

What are the impacts? What needs to be done about it? These are the primary questions of the Senate Inquiry, due to report by June 23.

Honorary CEO of Young Media Australia, Ms Barbara Biggins, welcomes the Senate Inquiry, but remains sceptical of the Inquiry's capacity to address the indirect sexualisation of children in the media.

*"The Inquiry seems to be focused on the issues of sexualised representations of children in the media," comments Biggins. "While this is very important, there are problems with children's exposure to overly sexualised adult images in areas where children have every right to be."*

Women's Forum Australia (WFA) director, Ms Melinda Tankard Reist, is especially critical of explicit billboards, and she calls for the Federal Government to ban them.

*"At a time when it is illegal to put up naked... girlie pin ups in the workplace, why is it okay to have hyper sexualised images on billboards, seen by everyone, including children?" asks Tankard Reist. "This is a form of sexual harassment. It also contributes to giving boys distorted views of women by sexually objectifying them."*

The self-regulation of advertising and marketing industries makes limiting children's exposure to sexualising images difficult.

*"The Senate Inquiry is important because it has the power to look at the issues across all media," says Biggins. "Australia's media regulatory system is fragmented and some media such as advertising and marketing practices...are outside the main regulatory systems."*

The self-regulating Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) incorporated a seminal section on the sexualisation of children in its code just days before the Inquiry's commencement.

*"Among the major changes is a direct prohibition against the sexualisation of children or the use of sexual imagery in advertising/marketing communications to children," states the AANA's website.*

TAI, WFA and YMA's Inquiry submissions demand that the Federal Government establishes a body to oversee all media with a division dedicated to administering children's interests.

If the Senate approves these recommendations, perhaps the children's division could ask why primary aged girls need to practise pouting, omit healthy food groups, smell good in bed, buy adult makeup and seek sexually implicit relationship advice from celebrities.

## No age limit for corporate molesters

Child abuse takes many forms, and photographs of 14-year-old models are morally repugnant

I WAS infuriated by the announcement that a 14-year-old model would be striking those high-fashion poses on Australian catwalks, alongside the fully matured 15 and 16-year-olds who pose and pout for ageing women and perverting men. And I was delighted when, at last, there was a public uproar.

What does an under-age model from Poland have to do with kiddie porn downloads in Australia or child prostitution in Thailand? Sadly, a great deal. They're variations on the theme of child abuse.

In war zones across the world, kids are used as killers. Dragged from their families, drugged and indoctrinated, countless thousands of child soldiers are committing atrocities in the name of this or that god, on orders from a wide variety of war lords. While some children survive physically, their minds are mutilated.

Millions of others are enslaved as virtual or actual slave labourers, whether on feudal or family farms or in the infamous famous-brand factories in developing nations.

As children we were required to be horrified by the writings of 19th and early 20th-century novelists — Dickens, Hugo, Upton Sinclair and the rest — describing kids being sent down mines or up chimneys or on to the streets to beg. But that was all in the olden days, wasn't it? Let's all trot off



PHILLIP ADAMS

to the theatre and get amused and misty-eyed by *Oliver!* or *Les Mis*. Note the cheerful exclamation mark and the coy abbreviation in those titles, signifying that it's all good, clean, sentimental fun.

The truth is that the 21st century offers tough times aplenty to more youngsters than we can begin to imagine. Horror stories abound even within Australia. You don't have to go to remote Aboriginal communities to find abused children. I could fill this newspaper from cover to cover with stories of child abuse in nice streets like yours.

For a while the stories of pedophilia within the Catholic Church had the public aghast and the Vatican reeling. If the abuse was bad, the cover-ups, implicating the Anglicans as well, were scandalous. And moral panics followed revelations about the kiddie-porn downloaders in our society including teachers, police and a senior associate of the NSW Director of Public Prosecutions.

We know, of course, that this is the tiniest tip of a titanic iceberg, with

child pornography one of the net's principal preoccupations.

We're dealing with an immense international perversion.

What's the distinction between kiddie porn and the photographs depicting the Polish child in her sultry poses? Apart from employing classier photographers and expensive make-up artists, I don't see one at all.

The sexualising and violation of ever younger children by do-it-yourself deviants is universally condemned. Yet up-market imagery for the fashion industry and glossy ads are accepted and admired. In a sense it is more morally repugnant and more cynical.

For years I've been attacking the forms of child abuse we take for granted and implicitly approve as parents, the phenomenon I call corporate pedophilia.

This goes far beyond the equalisation of children. It involves a mass attack on the nature of childhood.

The perverse preoccupation with children by the biggest of our businesses, the obscene way many of our wealthiest corporations have focused their products, marketing efforts and advertising billions on children as young as four or five is reprehensible and out of control.

Business hires child psychologists to infiltrate the child's psychology. It brings in armies of market research-

ers, product designers, photographers, filmmakers and ad agencies to turn children into zombied consumers of fast food, crap television and fad fashion.

There is an age of consent for sexual relations. While it varies between our states like the old railway gauges, so that a sexual relationship can be legal here and criminal there, at least the notion of protecting the child is in the statutes. But with corporate pedophilia, no child is too young. Go and pick on someone your own size! To confuse and exploit children is truly immoral. To try to addict them to your franchised food is bad enough, but to bombard them with ads for every imaginable product category, to try to bring puberty from the teens into the tens and even earlier is unforgivable. And in many product categories the possibility exists that poverty-stricken under-age workers are producing the goods that are foisted on more affluent under-age consumers in the West.

As surely as the ultra-violence of video games has made child soldiers of an entire generation of teenage boys, the kiddie fashions, parodies of what adults are wearing, must confuse the little girls who wear them. By turning the sandpit into the catwalk, we encourage inappropriate responses in adults and children alike.

*The Australian, 15 April 2008*

## Teen girls spurn the tamer mags

Sally Jackson  
Magazines

THE idea that young people moving online has led to falling readership of teen magazines is a myth, according to research presented by *Girlfriend* magazine.

Despite the hype surrounding teens and the internet, magazine readership levels for girls aged 14-17 had remained steady over the past 10 years, said Nicole Sheffield, publisher of youth titles at Pacific Magazines.

However, the research showed girls were changing their magazine reading habits, abandoning the tamer teen monthlies *Girlfriend* and its ACP Magazines rival *Dolly* for the juicier fare of gossip weeklies such as *NW*, *Famous* and *OK!* with their suspected baby bumps, sex tape scandals and relationship hook-ups and break-ups.

"According to the latest Roy Morgan readership statistics, we can tell you with certainty that readership in the teen market has not decreased or moved online," Ms Sheffield told the *Girlfriend* Youth Forum last Thursday.

"Magazine readership levels are actually higher in this female age bracket than in any other."

The research found nine in 10 girls aged 14-17 were magazine readers — that is, they had read the latest issue of at least one magazine.

Girls were 30 per cent more likely than the general population to be heavy consumers of the magazines, which was defined as having read five or more issues of current magazines. But they were 17 per cent less likely to be consumers of the internet.

Nevertheless, over the past decade, readership of *Dolly* fell 28 per cent, from 527,000 in December 1997 to 377,000 in December 2007, while *Girlfriend* declined by 17 per cent, from 408,000 to 339,000.

In the year to December, the number of *Girlfriend* readers aged 6-13 fell by almost 4 per cent to 225,000, according to the Roy Morgan Young Australians Survey. The number of tweens reading *Dolly* fell by 11 per cent to 190,000.

The number of 10-13 year olds reading *Girlfriend* was about

steady at 188,000 during the year while *Dolly* lost 25,000 readers in this age group to finish at 155,000.

"(Although) readership of magazines per se by this age group has not decreased, there is an increasing readership of the gossip magazines by this group," Ms Sheffield said.

"Their appetite for pictures, particularly of celebrities, is huge, and that is why they would be buying weekly magazines. The cult of celebrity is very important for this market and how we manage that is critical."

However, Ms Sheffield said she would not overturn *Girlfriend*'s Self Respect campaign, under which it had banned certain celebrities from its pages, including Paris Hilton, Nicole Ritchie and Britney Spears.

"It would be wrong for us to put back celebrities we have banned," she said.

"(Readers') relationship with us as a brand is that we're like a friend to them. (Now) we have achieved that, you will see increasing readership."

*The Australian, 7 April 2008*

## Web gets safer

**NEW international guidelines designed to make social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace safer for children were launched in Britain's parliament overnight.**

The guidelines were co-developed by the Australian Communications and Media Authority.

They recommend social networking profiles for users under 18 be made private by default and that there be reporting mechanisms for bullying or other antisocial behaviour on social networking sites.

The international push to make social networking sites safer follows moves by Swimming Australia to restrict public access to swimmers' social networking accounts. Swimming's national body was prompted to take action after photos of world record holder Stephanie Rice and controversial butterfly star Nick D'Arcy partying appeared in the media.

Australia, Britain and the US were the only countries to be involved in the initiative to make social networking websites safer.

Mahesh Sharma

*The Australian, 4 April 2008*

# R-rated video games a cave-in to powerful interests

*We should be keeping violence, not erotic films, away from impressionable young minds*

**D**UBLIN-based film director Neil Jordan famously said, "Nude scenes are quite embarrassing. I avoid them. I haven't done many nude scenes. I deal more in violence."

Jordan wouldn't be the first film director to admit to making violent films because he had issues with sex. History is replete with people who take out their sexual frustrations and repressions on others through armed combat and even wars.

This syndrome continues to affect many high-profile citizens, including sporting heroes, clergy and members of parliament.

But it is in the realm of what passes for entertainment that the nexus of violence and repression becomes a real issue for millions of people. Hollywood director Quentin Tarantino admitted to making the film *Kill Bill* (a blood-soaked, kung-fu-filled revenge tale) for anyone over 14 years of age. While in Sydney for the premiere of the film a few years ago, he told reporters: "That's why God invented video and ... multiplexes: for kids to sneak into R-rated movies." More significantly though, Tarantino said he was surprised that the consumer advice on *Kill Bill* from the Australian Classification Board was

**ROSS FITZGERALD**



that it featured only medium-level violence. While in Sydney, he asked: "How violent are the movies here, when this is 'medium'?"

Indeed he (and we) should well ask this key question. Tarantino is the world master of violent entertainment. His quip should have been jumped on immediately and investigated by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General to see whether levels of violence in Australian entertainment are set too high.

The first SCAG meeting since the November 24 federal election has recently concluded in Adelaide with the attorneys saying they would like some community opinion on a new R-rated video and computer games classification. Ostensibly they are checking to see what folks think about the extremely high levels of violence that will be in this category.

\*\*\*\*\*

members gang up on South Australia's hapless, evangelical Christian Attorney-General, Michael Atkinson, over his veto on a new R-rating for computer games.

I'm no supporter of Atkinson's deep social conservatism. I suspect that he rejects the R-rated computer game rating more for the sex in the R category than the violence. But when you look closely at the amount of sex and violence in R-rated films, there is about 80 per cent violence and only about 20 per cent simulated sex. Those who want plain old non-violent sex on film mostly go for the X category anyway, where they can see the real thing.

There is no suggestion that R-rated computer games will be any different from R-rated films in this regard and so this will be a category for mindless and instructive violence for those who get off on this sort of thing. If Labor were to stand true to its platform on violence, it would forgo the R rating in games and legalise an X rating for non-violent erotica. But that would be just too logical for our deeply politicised censorship system and the deeply politicised Classification

Board. This is a system that worships Hollywood violence on the one hand but, on the other, pushes motherhood statements, such as violence is given the utmost attention in the censorship process. What utter nonsense. With the conspicuous exception of Atkinson, the rest of Australia's state and federal attorneys should hang their heads in shame for trying to foist a category of computer games on us that will contain mostly mind-numbing violence.

But there are powerful forces behind this push. In 2006, sales of computer and video game hardware and software in Australia exceeded \$1 billion and Australians purchase 12.5 million computer and video games each year. A survey of popular Sega and Nintendo games taken a few years ago found that 80 per cent of them primarily featured violence or aggression.

While the attorneys decide on ways to force one of their own into giving Sony and Warner Bros a licence to print money in Australia, they seem intent on ignoring public opinion on the other 18+ category: the X one.

*The Porn Report* issued last month

Given that this is the first time SCAG is composed entirely of ALP attorneys-general, one would have thought they would have at least paid lip service to their 2007 federal election platform, which stated that the ALP was most concerned about violence and sexual violence in classification matters and that federal Labor would in fact commission an extensive research project on the impact of the portrayal of violence on our society.

So why don't the Labor attorneys-general just honour their commitment to convene this inquiry and get the research under way? It seems that Kevin Rudd is about as eager to upset Sony and Warner Bros as Kim Beazley was. The whisper is that the federal Government has no intention of convening this inquiry and that Attorney-General Robert McClelland and his junior, Home Affairs Minister Bob Debus, have had a stream of lobbyists representing Nintendo and Microsoft in their ears about creating this new R-rating for violent video games. Labor appears to be moving away from its stated policy of clamping down on violence as SCAG

by three leading academics — Alan McKee, Katherine Albury and Catherine Lumby — published by Melbourne University Press and reviewed in this newspaper, showed that the numbers of adult Australians watching X-rated films has leapt to 30 per cent and is climbing.

Unlike Jordan and Tarantino, I don't have a problem with consensual sex on film and vastly prefer it to films showing murders, rapes and serious assaults. On this I believe I carry the support of most fellow Australians. So why can't the attorneys find a way to introduce a regulatory scheme to make non-violent erotic films legal in all our states and territories and, at the same time, keep violence away from impressionable young minds?

Labor's promised inquiry into entertainment violence would go a long way towards bringing some sanity to the X v R-rated debate in this country.

FOR the record, although Peter Beattie's US appointment may have been cleared by the Integrity Commissioner, I am very disappointed that he has not stuck to his unambiguous commitment not to accept any office for profit within 12 months of resigning as Queensland premier.

*The Australian, 7 April 2008*

## Tolerance wears thin for anorexia websites

**AGENCIES**  
PARIS

FRANCE'S bold move to outlaw websites and blogs that encourage young girls to become dangerously thin is stirring debate among fashion gurus, health experts and politicians.

The groundbreaking bill adopted by the National Assembly this week would make it a crime punishable by up to three years in jail to "incite" anorexia or extreme thinness on websites, magazines and in advertisements.

The measure targets pro-anorexia websites that surfaced in the United States in the 1990s and have made their way to France, offering tips to girls who starve themselves in a desperate quest for beauty.

"There has been an explosion of these sites over the past year," said right-wing deputy Valéry Boyer, author of the bill that goes before the Senate in the coming weeks for final approval. "They offer morbid advice to young girls on how to lie to their parents. It's mental manipulation," he said.

### “Morbid advice to young girls”

Displaying photos of stick-thin model Kate Moss and actress Nicole Richie, the sites lay down the 10 commandments of the "pro-ana" movement. Among them:

You are not beautiful unless you are thin. Being thin is more important than being healthy. Being thin and not eating shows real willpower and success.

Called "Ana my queen" (Ana ma reine), another site provides a list of ploys to avoid eating, such as announcing you are invited to a friend's house for a meal, or taking tiny bites.

Ms Boyer said she was confident bloggers and website operators would decide voluntarily to shut down, but added she expected quick action against those who resisted.

"We will now have the means to shut them down," said Ms Boyer, a member of President Nicolas Sarkozy's governing party.

In presenting the bill, Health Minister Roselyne Bachelot singled out what she termed "death messages" being disseminated on the web to young girls who are made to believe anorexia and bulimia are lifestyle choices and not illnesses.

*The Advertiser, 19 April 2008*

### Political correctness gone mad

I hope that Tony Cavanagh checked that the *Play School* dad had a current licence and was not over .05 before he took his family in the car to go on holidays. After all, "even two-year-olds have a remarkable ability to learn and remember things". Come on Tony, let your granddaughter just enjoy the fun of *Play School* without getting bogged down with all your political correctness. Also, what's wrong with feeding seagulls stale bread?

Anne Turnbull, Belgrave Heights

*The Age Green Guide, 24 April 2008*

# Tighter rules on ads for kids

Lara Sinclair

NEW advertising rules prohibit the sexualisation of children in marketing material and widen the definition of advertising to include new media such as the internet.

The code, released by the Australian Association of National Advertisers yesterday, also includes a ban on "pester power", stating that ads must not urge children to ask parents to buy a product for them.

Rules on the use of popular personalities or celebrities as well as the use of premiums — such as the toys in McDonald's Happy Meals — have been tightened but the code stops short of banning them altogether.

The AANA left open the possibility of changes to its food and beverage guidelines, to bring them into line with world standards. The new code was released a week after a circular was sent to AANA members warning "the policy pendulum" was likely to swing under the Labor Government towards a "more interventionist approach".

"Food and beverage and alcohol advertising and marketing might be only the first to be hit

## Review to tackle TV violence

**THE Advertising Standards Bureau will review its determinations where violence was an issue during the past five years, as violence has become the top consumer concern.**

**ASB chief executive Alison Abernethy told Media that while sex, sexuality and nudity attracted the highest percentage of complaints, a recent study commissioned by the bureau revealed consumers were more concerned about the amount of violence appearing in commercials. Last year, complaints about sex accounted for 37.91 per cent of all complaints, ahead of vilification and discrimination on 28.05 per cent and health and safety on**

on the pendulumic backswing," the note stated. However, AANA chairman Ian Alwill said advertisers continued to have access to the Labor Government. "When there is a change of government, there is a change of attitudes," he said. "(They have been) as approachable." He ruled out opening up the administration of the self-regulatory codes to other industry bodies.

**10.85 per cent. Complaints about violence represented just 8.42 per cent of all complaints, ahead of concerns about car advertising, advertising to children, bad language and food and beverage issues.**

**Ms Abernethy said the review was prompted by concerns that the ASB might not have been keeping up with prevailing community attitudes.**

**The move comes just as the RSPCA has launched a graphic and disturbing ad featuring a woman being bashed by a man to highlight that people charged with domestic violence are often also found to be cruel to animals.**

Simon Canning

Mr Alwill said, meanwhile, that more than 100 applications had been received from people who wished to join the board of the Advertising Standards Bureau, which adjudicates on advertising content matters.

Former federal court judge Deirdre O'Connor was appointed earlier this month as the board's first independent reviewer.

*The Australian, 17 April 2008*

## Law to curb cyber bullies

Patricia Karvelas  
Political correspondent

RETIRED Family Court chief justice Alastair Nicholson has increased the pressure on the Rudd Government to establish laws that make cyber bullying illegal, saying the current legislation provides poor protection for victims.

Mr Nicholson, chairman of the National Coalition Against Bullying, told *The Australian* yesterday the law had not kept up with advances in technology, and said that without legislation to tackle cyber-bullying, the problem would escalate.

"There are serious cases of harassment and bullying among young people, and the laws haven't addressed those properly," he said. "It's time they had a good look at the whole thing. It's put a new dimension on bullying."

The Government has pledged to act on cyber bullying and to consider Mr Nicholson's proposals.

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy said: "The Government's comprehensive strategy will provide children with skills to behave as responsible online participants, understand how their actions may affect others and how to respond to incidents such as cyber-bullying or breaches of privacy."

The Government will ask the new joint parliamentary committee on cyber-safety to investigate law reform. The committee will give all concerned — including parents, teachers, health workers and police — the chance to present their concerns to shape future policy.

Mr Nicholson said social networking websites such as Facebook had exacerbated the problem. "We have a situation where you can text-message a whole class or lampoon people," he said.

*The Australian, 30 April 2008*

## Auto shenanigans keep Take-Two's pedal to the metal

Nick Wingfield

THE latest instalment in the *Grand Theft Auto* videogame series is expected to shatter sales records when it hits stores overnight, but the game's release will also revive the heated debate over sex and violence in gaming.

*Grand Theft Auto IV*, one of the most eagerly anticipated videogames of the year, is receiving rave reviews from many critics, a potential indicator of solid sales for the title.

Blockbuster success could also influence the outcome of a \$US2 billion (\$2.1 billion) hostile takeover bid for Take-Two Interactive Software, the publisher of *Grand Theft Auto*, by Electronic Arts, as it would reinforce Take-Two's belief that the company deserves a higher offer from EA.

*Grand Theft Auto IV*'s racy content shows that Rockstar Games, the game-development group within Take-Two that produces the series, hasn't been tamed by past controversies.

Users have already begun posting videos on the internet of sex scenes from the game, in which players can drive prosti-



Blockbuster: Poster for *Grand Theft Auto IV* in Times Square

tutes to secluded locations. Players can also drive an intoxicated character home from a bar, as the game shifts into a disorienting visual mode intended to simulate drunk driving.

"It's going to cause a huge ruckus," Pacific Crest Securities analyst Evan Wilson said. "These guys are all about pushing the envelope."

The last major version of the game, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, ignited a firestorm

when an independent programmer created a software patch that revealed hidden sex scenes — known as the "Hot Coffee" scenes — that Rockstar said were never meant to be accessed by players.

An industry ratings group changed the rating of the game to "adults-only" from "mature", prompting most major retailers to drop the title from their shelves.

Set in an urban crime world

where players can beat up police and cause other forms of mayhem, the *Grand Theft Auto* series has long attracted the attention of politicians and other critics of electronic game content.

But unlike the Hot Coffee scenes, Rockstar says all of the content in *Grand Theft Auto IV*, including the sex scenes, were seen by an industry ratings body before the game went on sale. In the US the game has a mature rating, meaning people 17 years and older can purchase it.

A spokeswoman for Rockstar said the sex scenes fitted in logically with all of the goings on in Liberty City, a seedy, fictional urban environment that resembled New York.

Mr Wilson predicts first-week *Grand Theft Auto IV* sales could be more than \$US400 million.

On Metacritic.com, which compiles game-review scores from dozens of publications, the PlayStation 3 version of the game had a 100 out of 100 score, while the Xbox 360 version had a 99 as of Monday afternoon. Very few games ever hold scores of 99 or above.

Mr Wilson believes any serious controversy over *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s content could have a wider impact by discouraging competitive bids for New York-based Take-Two by large media companies.

EA remains the only company that has made a formal offer for Take-Two.

It recently extended its deadline until May 16 for Take-Two shareholders to accept an offer of \$US25.74 a share for the company, after it earlier failed to win sufficient investor support.

Take-Two has said it is willing to begin discussing a deal with suitors, including EA, after *Grand Theft Auto IV* ships, though it has long said EA's offer is too low. "We've maintained all along that the full potential of *Grand Theft Auto IV* would be evident after the launch, and that appears to be the case," Take-Two chief executive Ben Feder said. "We are very pleased."



*The Australian, 30 April 2008*

# Good night, sleep tight

**G**OING to the movies can be one of the most exciting and wondrous experiences in a child's life, providing memories that often stay with them forever. The first time I went to the cinema was to see the original *Star Wars* trilogy played back to back at an old theatre at Albury.

Like millions of kids the world over, it blew my mind. As soon as I got home, I put a back-to-front stack-hat over my eyes and attempted to use The Force to sense objects I couldn't see. Needless to say, it didn't work. Neither did my attempt to use the Jedi Mind Trick. "These

aren't the chocolates you're looking for," I'd say in my best Alec Guinness voice, waving a hand in front of my brother's eyes, shortly before he beat me up.

A reasonable person – or even a teenager – wouldn't attempt such a thing because they know on some level that The Force is just something George Lucas made up as part of a story and that R2D2 is actually a three-foot eight-inch tall midget from Birmingham called Kenny Baker.

But that's precisely why there's so much debate and interest around what children should be allowed to watch and at what age.

At the heart of most concerns about children and the movies is the fear they're so much more impressionable than the rest of us – that they'll imitate whatever they see, believe whatever garbage the characters might say or take to heart a movie's underlying message (which is always open to interpretation – in *Star Wars*, the message

could arguably be that terrorist attacks are justifiable in certain circumstances, such as the blowing up of Death Stars). The research seems to bear out parents' fears. Warren Cann, executive director of the Parenting Research Centre, says most children under three don't make a distinction between the real world and what they see on screen.

"Research has shown that most of the children in this age group believe that a bowl of cereal shown on a television will spill if you turn the television upside down," he says. "They think what is happening is real."

Similarly, independent children's media analyst Lee Burton says that in the course of her research, she has come across boys as old as eight and nine who not only idolised Rambo but believed he was a real person.

"They thought he was a real person being followed around by a film crew like a documentary," she says, adding she's also met classes full of five-year-olds who believe that

*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* really do live in the sewers.

"The line between reality and fantasy is very thin for children," she says. Burton adds that individual children develop cinema and media literacy at different rates.

Literacy in this sense means the ability to understand things like editing techniques, or what zooms are, or to have developed the ability to follow more complicated plots.

While many people seem to simply expect children will be able to understand a complicated film in the same way an adult does, children first need to learn to do so step by step. Burton likens it to teaching children to read *Run Spot Run* before gradually increasing the complexity of the prose, plot and characterisation so they can read *War and Peace*.

Continued 19

## From 17

But while Burton says most 10- and 11-year-olds are able to understand visual language and more complex stories, "they still need good socialisation skills and good-values education from their parents in order to negotiate the barrage of conflicting messages they get from films."

Cann says it's important that parents critically examine the sorts of messages and themes embedded in the movies their children are watching.

"Films and TV bring a range of influences, ideas and experiences into your child's life," he says. "You'd never let a stranger into your house to do that, so you need to be careful. Kids are learners. They're absorbing stuff all the time and content matters. It pays to think 'What will this expose my child to? Is he ready? Will he cope? Will he enjoy it? Is it consistent with my values base? Is it a message I want him to have?'" For many parents, one of the more disturbing aspects of cinema is the violence that is so integral to many plots. Battles, murder and mayhem may have been part of great stories since time immemorial, but the visceral nature of violence has made it the de facto setting for cinema.

Research suggests people react 85 per cent more strongly to images than words. This is a sobering statistic when combined with the estimate that the average child has seen about 200,000 violent acts by the time they reach adulthood. Cann says the jury is no longer out on the link between on and off-screen violence.

"Children learn from what they see and there is an association between being exposed to on-screen violence and aggression in children," he says. "People still argue the point but the research is pretty clear."

But what about movies that contain dark or scary material? Should we attempt to protect kids from being frightened?

Burton argues that not all dark and scary themes are a problem.

"There have always been dark scenes in children's stories," she says. "Think about the fairytales we tell very young children, with their big bad wolves and witches. They're scary characters but kids

love them because they're very black and white and there's a clear distinction between good and bad that children can get a grasp on.

"What is really dangerous for children under 14 are those grey areas that adults might understand, like a very complex character who is actually quite murderous and violent and does bad things, and yet is attractive."

The character of Rambo springs to mind or perhaps Keanu Reeves's latest incarnation in the new film *Street Kings*, in which he plays a violent cop with a penchant for murdering criminals rather than arresting them.

While the movie classification system is an excellent starting point to guide parents through the minefield, Cann says personal discretion based on your own unique understanding and knowledge of your own children is just as important.

Cann says there are some things that ratings don't pick up that a parent might: "When I was seven or eight, I was exposed to an image that haunted me – it was a pirate being thrown off the end of the pier tied up in a bag – and an image as simple as that was a powerful and upsetting image to me for years."

Cann is not alone in this – one 1999 American study found a quarter of all college students were still affected by something disturbing or frightening they viewed as children.

"I don't think parents should totally rely on the classification system and a bit more research on the content is worthwhile," he says. One group dedicated to providing more information on movie content for parents is Young Media Australia whose reviews are published in these

pages. Vice-president Liz Handsley says the number one classification issue for the organisation is the marketing of M-rated films to children.

"There is any number of M-rated films that are unsuitable for kids under 15 that are mercilessly promoted to kids through things like *Spider-Man* pyjamas for four-year-olds," she says. "All the stores have got big promotions with pencil cases and backpacks for the latest *Harry Potter* film or *Transformers*, *The Incredible Hulk*, the new *Batman*, films. The merchandise comes out long before the movie is classified M and it allows the idea to spread it's a kids' movie, making the rating almost irrelevant."

Another recent phenomenon has been movie franchises that start off suitable for kids, and then become progressively darker. While older critics like me certainly prefer the later, more complex *Harry Potter* films, there's no doubt that it has made the job of parents harder in trying to keep youngsters away from M-rated sequels if they've already been hooked by the first few films in the series that were PG.

The next film, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, is released in December, so it's worth preparing now.

"It will be an individual decision based on what you think your children are ready for," says Cann. "But parents should feel they're in charge and be able to make the call, even when your kids tell you that all the other kids have already seen it. You need to explain why you're doing it, and be able to say 'No' and stick to it, no matter how unpopular that will make you in the short term."



Clunker ... Actor Eric Bana in 2003 film *The Hulk*.



## THE PULSE

Compiled by Dr Christine White

KIDS who watch too much TV and don't get enough sleep are increasing their chances of becoming overweight. In the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* this week, research has found children who sleep less than 12 hours and watch two or more hours of television a day are twice as likely to become overweight by the age of three than those who sleep more and watch less TV. A total of 915 children were studied. When the children were six months, one year and two years old, their mothers reported their average nightly sleep time and daily TV viewing time. Children who slept less than 12 hours and watched two or more hours of TV a day had a 16 per cent chance of becoming overweight by age three.

*Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*  
2008;162:305-311 (Taveras EM, et al)

*The Weekend Australian*, 12-13 April 2008

## Play School not stale

While Tony Cavanagh (Letters, 17/4) despairs at the wrong messages *Play School* is sending to our children, I rejoice in the positive messages espoused by this program. Women have been firefighters, men have assumed nurturing roles at home, death has been dealt with in a sensitive manner, boxes have metamorphosed into baths, cars and boats, and seatbelts are mentioned with an obligatory click-clack. As for the story where a grandfather fed stale bread to the seagulls, the message my children received was that simple pleasures and loving relationships are infinitely more important than expensive toys. Keep those messages coming, ABC.

Kirsten Fox, Fairfield  
*The Age Green Guide*, 24 April 2008

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