Sellout for sexualisation seminar!

Adelaide parents, educators, school counsellors, and community leaders came out in droves to the Nov 23 Bratz, Britney and bralettes seminar on the sexualisation of children in and by the media. The seminar, held in the Immanuel College Centenary Theatre, reached a capacity audience of 300 five days in advance, with another 100 unable to book seats.

Jointly organised by the Australian Council on Children and the Media, and Kids Free 2B Kids, the seminar featured Steve Biddulph, Julie Gale and Elizabeth Handsley, and was chaired by popular ABC Morning Radio presenter Matthew Abraham.

Those attending found the content enlightening and challenging, and by turns, entertaining and fun. As with the earlier seminar held in Melbourne in early August, those attending expressed relief at finding they weren’t the only ones concerned about what they saw as harmful pressures on their children.

Julie Gale, founding Director of Kids Free 2B Kids inspired the audience with her direct action in retail situations. Prof Elizabeth Handsley explained how the law had failed children and parents, and where pressure was needed to make regulation work better to protect children. Steve Biddulph (seen Left speaking to the capacity crowd), in his inimitable fashion, discussed the impacts of commercialised and sexualised media on families and children, encouraged parents to review their own attitudes, body image concerns and anxieties that result from exposure to advertising, and offered ways to support children.

The audience came away from the seminar well satisfied, and armed with a range of strategies for action, both within their families and within the community.

ACCM and KF2BK are planning to continue these seminars as funding permits. They wish to thank the Lions of Richmond, Immanuel College, and Matthew Abraham (and the ABC Morning Radio program) for their support for the Adelaide seminar.

Growing up fast and furious: Reviewing the impacts of violent and sexualised media on children

Friday 19 March 2010, 9am - 5pm
NSW Teachers Federation Conference Centre
37 Reservoir Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

An Australian conference on Children and the Media, with international researchers, Prof Rowell Huesmann (long term impacts of violent media), Prof Ed Donnerstein (Internet violence and cyber-bullying), Distinguished Prof Craig Anderson (violent video games), and Prof Louise Newman (Victoria, sexualisation of children), Dr Wayne Warburton (NSW, violent music videos), Dr Cordelia Fine (Victoria, advertising) and Prof Elizabeth Handsley (SA, regulation and classification).

Don’t miss this unprecedented opportunity to see several of the world’s leading researchers on children and the media speaking together in Australia.


‘Wild things’ 500th review

ACCM’s movie review service, Know Before You Go has just clocked up its 500th review. The service, which is funded by the South Australian Attorney General’s Department, reviews all movies rated G, PG and M-rated movies which may appeal to children.

 Appropriately, the 500th movie reviewed was Where the Wild Things Are, which, although based on the well-known children’s book by Maurice Sendak, is rated PG for its violent and scary content and was found by our reviewers to be unsuitable viewing for under 9s with parental guidance recommended between 9 and 11.

ACCM is also pleased to announce that abbreviated versions of its movie reviews are now appearing every week in the Adelaide based Sunday Mail newspaper. Know Before You Go reviews are on the ACCM website www.youngmedia.org.au
EDITORIAL

A mixed bag for Christmas.

Just when we thought we could relax for the holiday season and enjoy spending time with our families and friends, the Federal government has called two reviews, one at very short notice.

In addition, there have been two recent announcements relating to media regulation - one a good news story and the other very disappointing.

First the good news!

Family First parliamentarian Dennis Hood had the support of the Government to change the laws related to the display and promotion of R18+ videos and DVDs. This change should be welcomed by all SA parents.

New section 40A of the Act imposes new restrictions on how material for an R18+ film may be displayed.

To comply with new section 40A, the material for an R18+ film must be displayed in a different area from that in which material for other films is displayed. A different area includes, for example, a different aisle, a different shelving case, a different stand or different table.

New section 69A imposes new restrictions on the exhibition of films or parts of films classified R18+, and on the display of promotional material about films classified R18+.

New section 69A prohibits the occupier of premises to which the laws apply:

- exhibiting for promotional purposes at the premises a film or part of a film classified R18+; or
- displaying for promotional purposes at the premises a poster, pamphlet or other printed material in relation to a film classified R18+.

Review of multi-channels

On 4 December 2009, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, announced the release of a discussion paper, ‘Content and Access: The future of program standards and captioning requirements on digital television multi-channels’.

The discussion paper seeks comment on the program standards (for children’s programs and Australian content) and captioning requirements that should apply to commercial digital multi-channels.

Submissions close on 31 December 2009.

Details, including the discussion paper can be found at http://www.dbcde.gov.au/consultation_and_submissions/multichannels

R 18+ classification for computer games - Discussion paper released

Minister for Home Affairs Brendan O’Connor has encouraged people to share their views on whether an R 18+ classification category for computer games should be included in the Australian National Classification Scheme.

Mr O’Connor stressed that neither he nor the Government had formed a view on whether the Classification Scheme should include an R18+ Classification for computer games.

Submissions close on 28 February 2009.


Now for the bad news

The revised Free TV Code of Practice has been approved by ACMA and is being lauded as containing improvements for viewers. Apart from now being able to lodge complaints by email, there are few gains as far as we can see and some serious question marks hanging over the liberalisation of the promotion of MA15+ programs. Not to mention the fact that the new digital channels will be permitted to screen PG material all day - with of course, a parental education campaign so parents can take appropriate steps to protect their children!

The Federal Government now expects us to comment by 31 December 2009 on which other rules (governing children’s content, Australian content and captioning need apply to the new channels).

And then, in a master stroke of timing, the Federal Government has also, after many months of delay, called for comment by February 28 on whether there should be an R18+ category introduced for computer games.

A great time of the year to be asking parents to pay attention to this issue and make serious and well-researched responses!! Already, we understand that gamers are treating the inquiry template (see below) for responses as a petition and are voting YES in large numbers.

A much better question for parents to be discussing is, “Do you wish to see accessible to children, games with more extreme violence and higher impact depictions of sexual and drug activity?” For that is what we’ll see if gamers get their way

Have a peaceful Christmas.
Humphrey's a broke, homeless bear

Gavin Lower

What a funny old fellow is Humphrey, he gets in all manner of strife.

STRIFE to the tune of $50,000.

These are hard times for the big bear, once a powerful mascot for Australian children's shows but now the subject of business gone bad. By this point, little old bears aren't immune to the arcane world of liquidator hearings. It seems to grow up, with the trauma of family breakdowns, abuse, or parental alcoholism that often led to teenage depression.

"Play is the psychological inoculation against depression long-term," Dr Carr-Gregg said.

"We're hard-wired to play. In essence, the instinct to play is as instinctive as it is to breathe in mammals. Children will never develop their potential if we stop them from playing."

Dr Carr-Gregg will be a keynote speaker at the Playgroup conference on the Gold Coast on Friday.

Gloria Sherlock brings her son Charlie to a weekly Playgroup meeting in Brisbane to socialise with other toddlers. "Play comes naturally to them and they enjoy it," she said yesterday. "As long as he plays and he's happy I don't really mind what he does."

Dr Carr-Gregg criticised parental obsession with academic performance, saying children needed the freedom of imaginative play. "At the pre-school level, children engage in dramatic play and learn who is a leader, who is a follower, who is outgoing, who is shy," he said. "They also learn to resolve their own conflicts."

Dr Carr-Gregg, a former head of the New Zealand Drug Foundation and director of Melbourne University's Centre for Social Health, criticised "trophy parents" who pushed young children into too many organised activities. "It's as if we adults have become impatient with the concept of play," he said. "You get a lot of kids now whose parents are very time-poor."

"They have a hurried childhood, rushed around between activities like organised sport and French lessons. It's trying to parent — vicariously living through your child."

Dr Carr-Gregg said over-protective and controlling parents were creating a generation of wusses.

"Adults are now worshipping at the altar of occupational health and safety," he said. "It's risk-averse parents who are going to have children with no imagination, no capacity at all to be creative and innovative."

Dr Carr-Gregg, who is an ambassador for the depression lobby group Beyond Blue, said one in four teenagers was battling a mental illness before turning 18.

"I've seen neglect and abuse elsewhere," he said.

"Teenagers are living in these enormous echo chambers of huge houses, and they grow up on MSN and Facebook with not a lot of emotional input from mums and dads. They raise themselves."
Mickey gets mischievous in Disney makeover

ALEXANDRA FREAN

JUST an outline of his ears is enough. He is one of the most recognisable characters in the world, but Mickey Mouse is about to get a makeover.

More precisely, he is being "re-imaged" to enhance his appeal to youngsters of the video game generation who have been nurtured on the slick computer-generated graphics of the likes of Pixar and Dreamworks.

For decades, the Walt Disney Company has kept Mickey Mouse’s look and character largely unaltered, afraid that even the smallest change might harm a brand that earns the company $US3 billion ($5.4bn) a year in merchandising sales.

However, as US sales of Mickey merchandise have declined, a rethink was in order. So the squeaky-clean rodent is to be "re-imaged" to acquire a cunning and cantankerous streak when he appears in a new Disney video game, Epic Mickey, next year.

The move is part of an effort, understood to still be in its early stages, to rethink the character’s image, from the way he walks and talks to his appearance on the Disney Channel and what his house looks like at Disney World. Epic Mickey, designed for the Nintendo Wii console, is set in a cartoon wasteland inhabited by retired Disney creations. Players can opt to be a cooperative Mickey or a more destructive version.

Warren Spector, of Junction Point, a Disney-owned game developer working on Epic Mickey, said that it would be edgy and unexpected. He said: "By putting the mischievous Mickey back to his creative roots". In many ways the new Mickey does appear to be a return to the original character in the 1928 film Steamboat Willie, in which he appeared as something of a rabble-rouser.

Disney said that the re-imaging was about connecting Mickey to gamers aged 13 to 34, who would not normally be targets for Mickey merchandise.

The Australian, 9 November 2009

Parents fed up by food trickery

KATE SIKORA

SYDNEY

A CHILD advocacy group and a leading dietitian have called on food giants to stop using misleading marketing to trick consumers into believing they are eating healthy food.

The Parents' Jury – an online network campaigning for better food and physical activities for children – and Westmead Children's Hospital's paediatric dietitian Susie Burrell want manufacturers to market responsibly.

"Arnott's Shapes are marketed as 'baked not fried' but they are cooked in palm oil and that is misleading," Ms Burrell said.

"It's marketed as a healthy option food. It's not offering the kind of things that it should." Aside from the environmental impacts such as forest devastations, palm oil contains up to 55 per cent saturated fat which can lead to heart disease – the No. 1 killer of Australians.

Ms Burrell said many biscuits and other snack foods contained palm oil but without mandatory labelling it was listed as vegetable oil.

Another group is McDonald's which has health options meals and it might be low in fat but has a high amount of carbohydrates," she said.

"People believe they are doing the right thing by seeing these labels but they are misleading. " Companies are aggressively marketing products this way. I believe that some, such as Arnott's, who supply the monopoly of biscuits in families in Australia, have a corporate responsibility to market properly."

The Parents' Jury advocates better labelling to help families make informed choices when in supermarkets.

State and federal governments added to not make food manufacturers label the trans fat content of their products.

The decision was based on the grounds manufacturers in general were reducing the amount of trans fat that they used.

The Advertiser, 14 November 2009

Kitchen kids to feel the heat

MICHAEL BODDY

AUSTRALIAN children will be given the opportunity to cook up a storm next year when the Ten Network launches Junior MasterChef.

The series will screen in the last quarter of 2010 after the most popular TV series of 2009, MasterChef Australia, returns in the middle of the year.

"We've very keen to do a junior version because it's a great opportunity to look at the benefits of healthy eating and good food and produce and things like that, and we think that's really important," said Ten chief programming officer David Mott.

MasterChef Australia became a ratings phenomenon this year and its finale became one of the most watched programs of all time, with a peak audience of more than 4.1 million viewers.

"I think there will be enormous interest in a Junior MasterChef," Mott said. The MasterChef franchise will be "stripped" in the 7.30pm weeknight slot next year, after a return series of The Biggest Loser.

Ten will not return Celebrity MasterChef next year despite Mott's saying he was happy with its current ratings. Ten also has the option to introduce the MasterChef Professionals series in 2011. It is expected Junior MasterChef will use cooks aged between 9 and 12 years old. It will be one of the highlights of Ten's 2010.

The Australian, 2 November 2009

What a shame

IT'S not an award any marketing outfit would be happy to receive, but tomorrow the teams behind McDonald's Happy Meal Box of Play TV ad, Kellogg's cereals and the Little Red Rooster TV ad will compete for the title The Shame Award for Pester Power.

The Parents' Jury, a lobby group that has grown in stature since it was formed five years ago, uses the annual awards to name and shame products and ads that encourage children to eat unhealthy food.

The Australian, 16 November 2009

Turn it off

WITH regard to Chris Johnston asking why he can't control his children's TV viewing (Letters, 5/11), he can: don't allow it. I rarely watched TV growing up in the '90s. The only time was the couple of blissful hours on a Saturday morning watching cartoons until everyone else woke up and it was switched off. I learnt ideals, morals and values from my family, teachers and books. Not from sitting in front of the TV.

Amy Merrick, Dingley

The Age Green Guide, 12 November 2009
Curvy Kate has consumers in sweat, but ad watchdog says she looks just fine

JESSICA LEO
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

An underwear-clad Kate Ceberano, a carnivorous love match and different-sized bills have Australian consumers hot under the collar.

The Advertising Standards Bureau has revealed the advertisements - on TV, in print and on billboards - which have attracted complaints and gone under review.

Curvaceous Australian singer Kate Ceberano’s billboard advertisement for underwear company Playtex was targeted.

It was claimed it “undermines our social values”. The board, however, dismissed the complaint, instead taking the step of applauding the advertisement for depicting a “fuller-figured woman”.

Also complained about was a Toyota advertisement featuring an overweight man and a man of smaller stature in an effort to demonstrate “different sized bills” applying to different cars.

The complaint centred on the discrimination of overweight and shorter people. The board dismissed this.

A Target advertisement for a T-shirt sale attracted criticism as a girl declares she is a “hardcore, tofu-loving, vegan cat fancier”, to which a male cringes and acts disinterested. Vegans responded, saying “it implies a person is less valuable/less attractive/open to shunning because they are a vegan”.

The board chose not to uphold the claim because of the “light-hearted” nature of the advertisement.

There is a serious side to the complaints, however, with the Advertising Standards Bureau upholding a claim over a boat insurance company’s advertisement which appeared in an industry magazine.

The ad features the smiling faces of the sales team of Nautilus Marine Boat Insurance and at the top of the advertisement an image of an Asian boat loaded with people. Text in the advertisement reads “there’s (sic) people... and there’s (sic) boat people”.

The board upheld the complaint, noting that it was “very poor taste to attempt to use the plight of refugees to sell a boat insurance product”.

Too wild for kids

Parents warned as monster classic hits big screen

MARK CARO
NATHAN DAVIES

It’s based on one of the world’s most popular children’s books, but the movie adaptation of Where The Wild Things Are is no kids’ flick.

The PG-rated film, which opens in Australia on December 3, has received generally positive reviews but many critics have panned the dark themes and “inappropriate” monster suits.

Director Spike Jonze, best known for films Being John Malkovich and Adaptation, admits his film version of Maurice Sendak’s classic book may be too much for children.

“I didn’t set out to make a children’s movie,” Jonze said.

“I set out to make a movie about childhood,” Jonze says.

“Isn’t it like we were making this anti-kids movie.”

We were working from the inside out in terms of what we wanted it to feel like, as opposed to the outside in, in terms of what shelf it was going to go on in the video store.”

Where The Wild Things Are tells the story of nine-year-old Max (Max Records) who sails away from home after fighting with his mother (Catherine Keener).

He arrives on a desert island populated by neurotic monsters, who make Max their king in between destroying each other’s houses and smashing trees.

Australian Council On Children and the Media honorary CEO Barbara Higgins says parents with young children should probably think twice about allowing them to watch Where The Wild Things Are and other PG-rated movies.

“There are many reasons why PG films may not be suitable especially for young children, say under seven or eight,” Ms Higgins says.

“The sorts of things that parents need to watch out for with this age group include transformations from something good into something scary, such as the Incredible Hulk.”

“Grottesque images, monsters, loud noises, children and adults in danger or children being abandoned are other things to watch for.”

“There is content in Where The Wild Things Are that we wouldn’t recommend, especially for children under eight, such as violence, with children acting out of control and smashing things up, and many sights and sounds that will be scary.”

“All the overseas reviews indicate that this should be taken seriously.”

Ms Higgins says a PG rating does not necessarily mean a film will be fine for all children as long as an adult is present.

“What it does mean is that there will be material in the film that some children under the age of 15 may find upsetting or confusing and may require the guidance of a parent or guardian.”

PG films are supposed only to have mild impact, but it’s not clear for which age groups under 15 years that applies.

Spike’s wild ideas – IE, Page 89

The Australian Council On Children and the Media will be reviewing films from a parent’s perspective. IE from December 6.
Too young and too sexy – left with nowhere to grow

Is common sense enough to stop the sexualisation of children, or is it time the law was changed?

TORY SHEPHERD reports.

Bratz doll will not make a huge difference,” she says. “But if they’re reading girls’ magazines, and watching video clips… they’re being bombarded.”

Associate Professor Elizabeth Handsley, from Flinders University’s School of Law, says the law could play a part in protecting children.

HE says advertising standards are ineffectual because the images come from everywhere at once – not just ads, but programs, shops, books, magazines.

“My ultimate conclusion is that consumer protection laws are the best model to go forward,” she says. “It’s about what’s on television, in the music videos, it’s about ads that are not even aimed at children.

“It’s the actual clothes that are being sold to children. It’s the products themselves. It goes beyond the media. There’s an argument for using a legal framework to protect consumers.”

Associate professor Handsley says the Trade Practices Act prohibits corporations from engaging in misleading or deceptive conduct, and the word “sexualising” could be incorporated in a similar way.

Ms Gale says not just girls are affected. Boys can be the most affected by “perfect” images of males, but they are also left confused by the behaviour of their female peers.

“It’s hard, it’s very confusing for them. How do they treat females now?” she asks. All parents can do is be aware of the images and minimise or eliminate them, she says. The rest is up to the powers that be.

The Australian Council on Children and the Media and Kids Free 2B Kids will present a seminar: Bratz, Britney and Brallettes: The Sexualisation of Childhood on Monday at Immanuel College. Author and psychologist Steve Biddulph will also speak.

For more information visit www.youngmedia.org.au.

The Advertiser, 20 November 2009

TV turns too aggressive

Good week for . . .

TODDLERS who don’t watch much television, after research showing they are less aggressive than their goggle-eyed counterparts. The study involved more than 3000 mothers of children aged about three who filled out questionnaires about their kids lifestyle and behaviour.

Toddlers exposed to more TV were at increased risk of aggressive behaviour; the study in Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine found. The authors said they couldn’t be sure that violent TV content caused aggression because they didn’t have details of the program the children watched.

(Manganello, J, et al)

The Age, 7 November 2009

The unsavoury side of Glee

HOW does Ten get away with showing Glee at 7.30pm? It may look like High School Musical but the similarity stops there. Glee is all about teenage sex and the episode screened on 12/11 left nothing to the imagination during the “Push it real good!” dance scene, where even oral sex was feigned. They sang. “Girls are gonna get passed” and “What we want is sex!” This is inappropriate for our young people, who can bet are in their bedrooms watching this stuff unsupervised.

Karyn Wilson, Hamilton

The Age, 19 November 2009
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CONFERENCES
World Summit on Media for Children and Youth
14-18 June 2010
Karlstad, Sweden
http://www.wskarlstad2010.se/
TV exposure adds to aggression in 3- year-olds.

US researchers have found that three-year-old children exposed to more TV both directly and indirectly, are more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviour.

The study surveyed the mothers of over 3,000 children about the amount of television watched by their children and the amount of TV use in the household.

Children who were smacked, lived in disorderly neighbourhood or had depressed mothers were significantly more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviour, but TV exposure was significant even when these other factors were controlled for.


Which toys to buy?

TRUCE (Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment), a US based organization of educators concerned about the impact of media and commercial culture on children has released its 9th Annual Toy Action Guide. The guide provides a list of toys and trends to avoid as well as toys of value. It is available online free on the TRUCE website: www.truceteachers.org.

TRUCE recommends avoiding toys that bring violence into rescue-related play, link non-nutritious food to play, lure little girls into focusing on teenage behavior, equate money and shopping with fulfillment and fun, use electronics to overstimulate babies, or promote young children's interest in inappropriate content.

TRUCE recommends toys that promote dramatic play and manipulative play with small play objects, encourage respectful, non-stereotyped, nonviolent interactions among children, allow children to determine play, and help children develop skills important for further learning and a sense of mastery.

Available TRUCE Guides Include:
- Infant & Toddler Play, Toys & Media Action Guide
- Toys, Play & Young Children
- Action Guide
- Media and Young Children Action Guide
- TV and Your Child

Unhealthiest cereals most marketed,

A report from the Yale University's Rudd Center for food policy & obesity has found that the least healthy cereals are the ones most marketed to children and that overall, children are exposed to a vast amount of marketing for highly-sugared cereals.

Among the findings in the report are:
- Compared to cereals marketed to adults, those marketed to children have 85% more sugar, 65% less fibre, and 60% more sodium.
- The average preschooler sees 642 cereal ads per year on television alone.
- Cereals marketed heavily on television are also marketed heavily on the internet.

The full report can be found at: www.CerealFacts.org.