

Paedophilia Inc, in the Weekend Australian Magazine, June 21-22, 2003, p. Phillip Adams 2003.

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In the past decade or so, the paedophilia panic has become an epidemic of anxiety and anger. You'll recall the issue consuming Belgian society, leading to mass demonstrations and political instability. It has shaken the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches to what's left of their foundations.

The dubious phenomenon of "repressed memory" has led to infamous court cases where innocent parents have been maligned as monsters and satanists. Schoolteachers may no longer comfort a kid who gets a grazed knee in the playground - and the proscriptions are having a major impact on recruiting, particularly of men. More and more celebrities seem intent on destroying their careers by downloading kiddie porn from paedophile networks. One of Australia's most respected judges committed suicide over accusations, and a governor-general has lost his job because of a clumsy attempt at a cover-up.

Yes, paedophilia is of profound concern but so, surely, is the response. Civil libertarians are right to point out that a rational discussion on the issue has become a virtual impossibility. A royal commission into paedophilia? Tell me how you'd write the terms of reference - when the overwhelming majority of cases occur within the home, within the family?

Hysteria on the one hand. Hypocrisy on the other. For it seems to me that our entire culture is complicit in the issue - in ways it chooses not to see. Indeed, it is obscured and eclipsed by the media frenzy. In some of its manifestations, the media are not only involved in the sexual abuse of children but undoubtedly instigate it. The mass of pornography in the unmediated world of the Internet is bad enough. But the images that are projected in the mainstream media are equally ominous.

I'm talking about what I've been calling, for years, corporate paedophilia: the abuse of children - involving sexual abuse, violent abuse and economic exploitation - by some of the mightiest corporations.

I'm talking about the billions of dollars of marketing aimed at kids whose childhoods are being cynically abbreviated, stolen for profit. I'm talking about the sexualisation of ever younger children through advertising and for what passes for entertainment - so that kids are encouraged to see themselves as sexual beings long, long before puberty. Yes, the age of puberty is decreasing - and it will all but vanish if companies continue to employ their teams of child psychologists and ad agencies to turn ever younger children not simply into consumers, but into mini-adults.

And that's before you factor in the pornographies of violence - the escalations in mass murder that fill the public space of cinema screens and, more dangerously, the private fantasies on the computer screen. Media violence doesn't matter? The savageries of the video game aren't harmful? Bullshit.

There is a legal age of consent that makes having sexual relations with a child a criminal offence. But there's no age of consent when it comes to turning kids into consumers or attempting to brutalise or sexualise them. Or both. And corporations are upping the ante with new campaigns aimed at the demographic described as "tweenagers". This is molestation on a massive scale.

What's the moral and ethical distinction between sex tours to the Philippines and Thailand where paedophiles can rent young bodies, and the use of 13- and 14-year-old girls as high-fashion models in glossy magazines? Then there's the increasingly eroticised music video. Isn't there something kiddie pornographic about the eternally infantile Kylie? Let alone the umpteen clones of Brittany Spears?

We accept all this as perfectly normal. Well, it isn't. Or it shouldn't be. A child should be allowed to be a child for as long as possible. It is a child's right not to know about many of the ideas and issues and activities of the adult world. But, of course, kids know everything. They know about oral sex, anal sex and the genocide in Rwanda. And every kid hears, every night, on the news, more stories about paedophilic adults until they must get the impression that the entire planet is populated by sexual predators. Until loving parents begin to fear embracing their own kids lest it be misunderstood or disapproved of by others.

The age of innocence? Long gone. And the corporate paedophiles move in on our kids so that they'll wear, eat, drink and play their mass-marketed products. And if the parents don't comply with the child's implanted desires, created by squillion-dollar budgets, then fracture lines can appear within the family. Parents who resist or who simply cannot afford to comply with these hammered, hypnotic demands are, all too often, seen as failing their children.

Censorship remains undesirable and is now technologically impossible, anyway. While cinemas might turn the very young away, they get to see the films on video or DVD. In any case, as well as watching the nightmares on the television news, the very young are among the most enthusiastic viewers of such voyeuristic sludge as Big Brother.

But I've nothing but contempt for the parents who fail their children – and for the corporations that molest our kids. While recognising that this column is an exercise in total and utter futility, I write it anyway.

I like the fact that my four daughters believed in the tooth fairy and Father Christmas rather longer than average. Better that than believing in the values of Big Brother - or the even bigger brothers who replace their nursery rhymes with jingles and their dreams with assembly-line desires.

Shame on them. Shame on us.

Phillip Adams, Paedophilia Inc, in the Weekend Australian Magazine, June 21-22, 2003, p. 15