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Clerk to Panel on Education,
Legislative Council Secretariat,
Legislative Council Complex,
1 Legislative Council Road,
Central, Hong Kong.

Dear Madam,

On behalf of the Hong Kong Association of Sexuality Educators, Researchers & Therapists, I would like to submit our views on the subject of "Education on media literacy and free newspapers containing indecent content" to be discussed at the joint meeting on the 14th Feb., 2012.

Hong Kong children and young people spend a lot of time with the media everyday, probably much like their counterparts in the western hemisphere who spend an average of ten hours a day on the internet, television or mobile phones. The media has become, next to the family of origin, the most important factor influencing a young person's development. It is a matter of great importance and urgency that we educate our children and young people so that they have the ability to interpret and contextualize the thousands of messages that are sent to them through the media each day.

The media speaks to us through numerous advertisements on television, newspapers, magazines and sign boards on top of buildings and in MTR stations. Most of these advertisements in Hong Kong are about cosmetics and how to become beautiful and slim. Boys and girls watching prime time television programs from a young age are used to seeing these advertisements and may get the message that external beauty is very important. One example is an advertisement about a slimming company and it depicted a young woman wearing a sexy bikini coming out of the water on a beach. The praise for the young woman's good, slim figure was being played out in the vulgar facial expressions of two young men who were watching her on the beach.

The same company also had another advertisement picturing the same young woman walking in busy central district. The narrator told the audience that even a busy office girl has to take time off to slim her figure while the

television screen showed the young woman taking off her shirt, exposing the upper part of her body except for her bra. Our young people may get the idea that it is very important for a girl to have a good figure and that a lot of her worth lies in her physical appearance.

Some TV programs in the past were about actors and actresses taking part in games that involved a lot of body contact. Most of the time the actresses had to wear low-cut dresses or bikinis and the figures of these women were constantly emphasized by the special angle of the camera. This also happened in cooking programs in which beautiful actresses took part and who may be very bad cooks but they made up for their shortcomings by wearing low-cut dresses and bending low in front of the camera.

Some newspapers, especially the recently published free newspaper, contain sexually explicit images of women. The caption below these pictures often refer to these women having a long or prominent “career-line”, meaning the intermammary cleft. A lady told me that her eight-year-old daughter was already “worried about not having a good figure with a long career-line when she grows up.”

This free newspaper also carried pornographic stories in series, written by a very well-known journalist in Hong Kong. The opening part of the series in the September issue in 2011, for example, depicted sexual foreplay in great detail. The influence of this newspaper went far and wide because it was free of charge and was available for all in shopping malls, public housing estates, private residential buildings and on the streets. One teacher found that her eight-year-old girl student in primary three brought a copy of this newspaper to read at school. The girl got the newspaper from a shopping mall very near the school. The teacher confiscated the newspaper and told the class that this newspaper was unsuitable for young readers. Then the whole primary school was informed next day that this newspaper contained a lot of pornographic material not suitable for students.

Primary and secondary school students go on the internet and have easy access to pornographic information. Pornography sells mainly to male clients and degrades women, turning them into sexual objects. Young readers may get the message that sex is for men and that women had to submit to men’s sexual desires even though they are not willing. There is no need to bear responsibility for one’s actions and safer sex is not necessary. The most important issue is sexual enjoyment for men, even though it may be at the expense of a woman’s sufferings.

The sexualization of girls in pornography and the posting of advertisements for prostitution in some newspapers and on the internet, plus media messages stressing on consumerism and materialism, all have their effects on the self-objectification of girls who take part in compensated dating. These girl-students sell their bodies for money as young as thirteen years of age.

In a free society, we have to protect the rights of freedom of expression and the freedom to receive information, but on the other hand we have to protect our children and young people as they grow and develop. It is already far too late that we should develop education on media literacy so that our young people can develop critical thinking on the messages that the media conveys to them. They can then choose which programs they want to watch, and also be able to use the media to produce constructive messages.

In Hong Kong, most schools do not have education on media literacy. A small number of schools have taken part in research on this topic done by professors in the Hong Kong University Education Department and in the Baptist University Department of Communication Studies. These studies showed that Hong Kong students, although they were used to memorizing notes given by the teacher and not used to asking questions, enjoyed lessons on media literacy and could develop critical thinking. The research results showed that there was a positive change in the students at the end of a ten-session course.

Our association has been invited by the Education Bureau for many years to take part in the sex education seminars for the training of primary and secondary school teachers. We have always stressed on the importance of teaching media literacy to the students in sex education. We have also collaborated with the End Child Sexual Abuse Foundation to give follow-up sessions on media literacy to secondary school students after their sex education program. But the number of schools having education programs on media literacy is very small indeed.

We therefore propose that education on media literacy should be taught in all schools and that the Education Bureau should take the leadership in developing its curriculum. In order to succeed, the Education Bureau should give its support and make education on media literacy a mandatory subject. The following are the key points of our proposal:

- (1) The Education Bureau should form a committee to write the curriculum of education on media literacy for primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. The committee should include teachers from primary and secondary schools, professors and lecturers from the various universities and the Institute of Education, and members of organizations who give sex education programs to schools.
- (2) The curriculum should include a lot of small group discussions fostering critical thinking. The teachers should not teach a lot of theory to the students. Instead, they should let the students do the work themselves: observation, interpretation and then analysis. The teachers should teach the students to ask the important questions of:
 - Who created this message?
 - What techniques are being used?
 - How might different people understand it?
 - What are the values, lifestyles represented and what are being omitted?
 - Why is it being sent?The teachers should help the students understand that all media messages are constructed with a purpose or point of view and that most purposes are to gain profit or power. (Adapted from the Center for Media Literacy.) Students should visit a studio or production company so that they understand how productions are being made, especially the special effects.
- (3) The writing of the curriculum should be finished within one year.
- (4) Training courses should then be organized by the Education Bureau for primary and secondary schools taking part in a pilot program.
- (5) These teachers will then teach the course in their schools upon completion of their training.
- (6) Plan (4) and (5) will take about one year to complete, at the end of which the curriculum committee should meet with the teachers to see their results. Questions arising from the teaching of the course should be discussed and improvements and modifications made.
- (7) Then the curriculum should then be implemented in all primary and secondary schools when all the teachers concerned have a chance to be trained. (Probably within one or two years' time.)
- (8) The Education Bureau should provide reading material, audio-visual aids and resources for the course.
- (9) A tool should be developed by the curriculum committee to measure the outcome of the teaching of this course.
- (10) Teachers are free to make relevant changes in the curriculum in accordance with the religion or culture of the school.
- (11) The Education Bureau should give official support to education on media literacy by making it a mandatory subject.

- (12) The Education Bureau should provide further training sessions for teachers in all the schools or it can delegate this task to organizations, NGO's, which are experienced in media literacy training.
- (13) A support committee should be formed to give ongoing support to schools and teachers to answer questions, hold conferences and disseminate newsletters etc.
- (14) Schools are encouraged to organize talks for the parents of students and educate them on media literacy and the need for such skills in their children.
- (15) The government should give full support by allocating the necessary funds to develop such a curriculum in all the schools and for research.
- (16) More research should be done on the short-term and long-term effectiveness of the teaching program.

Thank you very much for your attention,

Yours truly,

Dr. Angela Ng Wing Ying

M.B., B.S.(HK), M.R.C.G.P.(UK)

Vice-chairperson

Association of Sexuality Educators, Researchers & Therapists

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